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God is love



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

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OUR HEAVENLY HOME;

OR,

GLIMPSES OF THE GLORY AND BLISS OF
THE BETTER WORLD.

GOD IS LOVE;

OR,

GLIMPSES OF THE FATHER'S INFINITE
AFFECTION FOR HIS PEOPLE.

GOD IS LOVE ;

OR,

GLIMPSES OF THE FATHER'S INFINITE
AFFECTION FOR HIS PEOPLE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“OUR HEAVENLY HOME,” “THE COMFORTER,”
“THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL.” ETC.

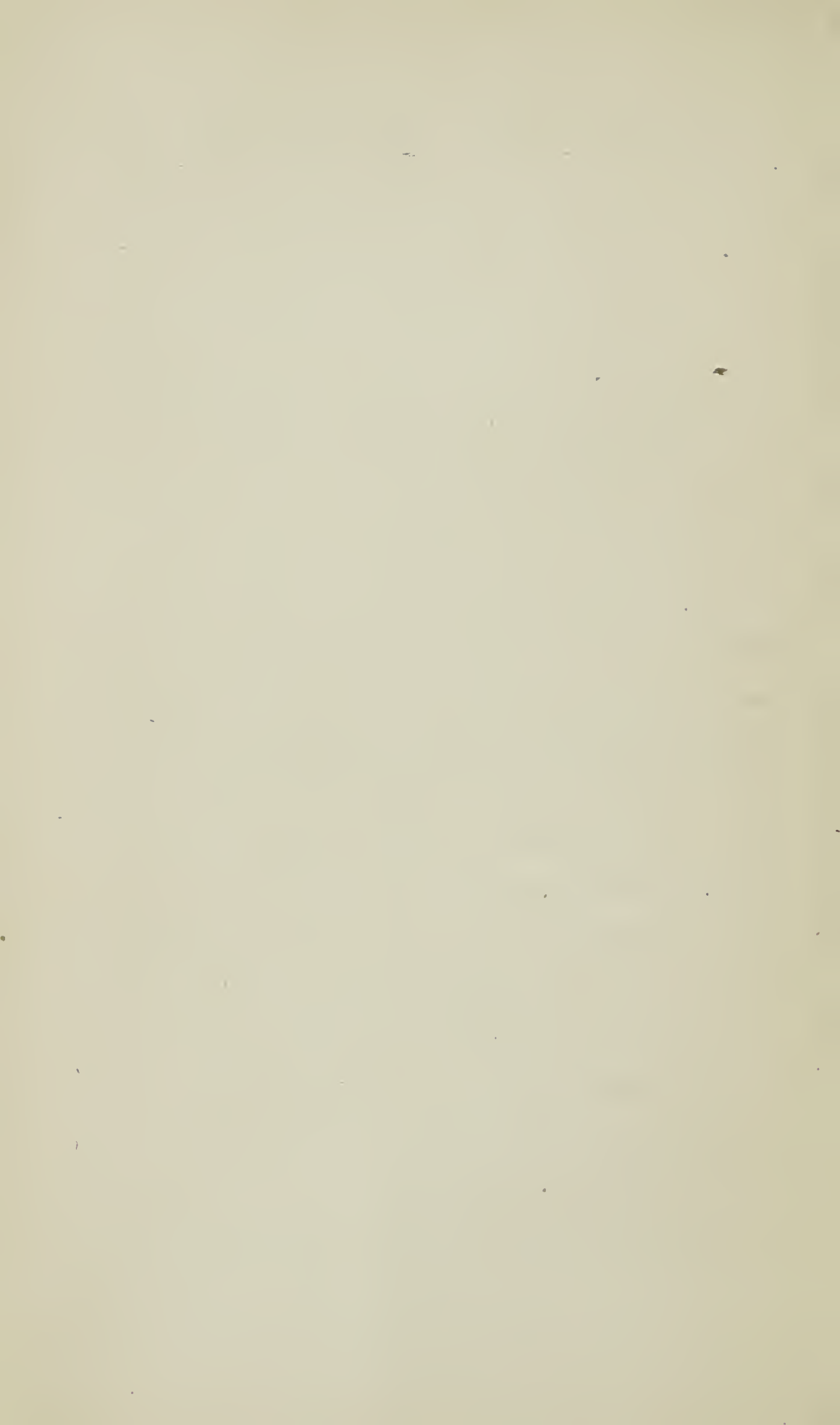
Ninth Edition.

James Grant

LONDON :

J. M. DARTON & CO., 42, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1866.



PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE first Edition of this work, consisting of a thousand copies, was exhausted in little more than four months, and the demand still continues to increase. It is to the Author the source of a greater gratification than he can express, that he has received from various quarters assurances of eminent profit and comfort having been derived from the perusal of the book. One such case will be found at the end of the volume. The Author gives a place to it, because one of the most distinguished divines of the day has written to him, that he regards it as one of the most remarkable instances of

book-usefulness he had ever met with. It is the Author's hope and prayer, that many such instances of profit and comfort may hereafter occur from the perusal of a volume in the preparation of which he has spent some of the happiest hours of his life—a life which has been, for many years, one of the most active and laborious, perhaps, that any human being ever led.

May 1858.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THE great object of this volume will be seen in every page. It is to establish and illustrate the glorious truth, that "GOD IS LOVE." In another little work lately published by the Author, under the title of "THE BROTHER BORN FOR ADVERSITY," he has sought to set forth the sympathies of the Saviour in the sorrows and sufferings the saints experience on their pathway to heaven; and in this volume he has endeavoured to bring home to the minds and hearts of all believers the consoling and sanctifying conviction, that God's heart is ever full to overflowing of affection for His people. The

writer knows from experience the tendency there is in the minds even of those who have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, to turn away from God the Father, as if they discerned a perpetual frown in His face, and to seek for rest and repose in Christ the Son. It is because he not only believes, but knows, that this feeling is deplorably prevalent even among the best of God's people, that he has laboured with so much earnestness to point out the error, and to shew how dishonouring it is to God, as well as subversive of the Christian's own peace of mind. The importance which the Author attaches to the subject will be his excuse for the frequency and emphasis with which he brings that peculiar aspect of it before the mind of the reader.

It may be right to remark, in reference to the occasional instances in which he has twice quoted the same passage of Scripture, that it will be found on every such occasion, that the second quotation has been given for the purpose

of illustrating an aspect of Divine truth, different from that which the first was intended to establish.

If the work, in the Author's own estimation, possesses any merit at all, it chiefly consists in the vast accumulation of conclusive scriptural proof which it contains, of the great and gracious fact,—that the heart of the Father is at all times, and under all circumstances, infinitely full of the most tender love for His saints.

The Author has only further to state, that never, perhaps, was a work of the kind written amongst so many interruptions, and under circumstances so unfavourable to that frame of mind which is necessary for the production of such a volume. This has arisen from the peculiarly distracting nature and extreme pressure of the professional avocations of the writer. Still, with all its imperfections, he humbly hopes that the book may be owned and blessed of Him,

to promote whose glory, in conjunction with the comfort of His people, it has been penned ; and should it ever come to the Author's knowledge that a single saint has received the slightest benefit, or derived any measure of comfort from the volume, he will feel amply compensated for the labour he has expended upon it.

November 1857.

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GOD IS LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ETERNITY AND SPONTANEOUSNESS OF THE FATHER'S LOVE.

IT is on every account of the deepest importance that our views of divine truth should be in accordance with the Word of God. Our own holiness and happiness, not less than the glory of Him whose people we profess to be, are involved in the fact of our entertaining correct notions of what is revealed in the Bible regarding those momentous subjects which are brought before us with special prominence in that blessed book.

It may be doubted whether there be a single person within the sound of the gospel, who has had his attention directed to divine things, who has not, at one period or other, been greatly

troubled in his mind on account of the hard thoughts which he has had of God the Father. The observation applies, with more or less truth, to both of the two great classes into which the world is divided,—those who have been converted from the error of their ways, and those who are still strangers to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Let any one, no matter to which of the two classes he belongs, examine himself, and see whether this be not at the present time, or at one time was, his experience. The conscience-stricken sinner and the partly-sanctified believer must equally acknowledge that he has, at some period or other of his life, looked on God in the light of an austere master, and regarded Him with more or less of slavish dread. There is a natural tendency in the minds of all, even of the regenerated as well as of those who have never been renewed in the spirit of their minds, to invest the character of God the Father with a sternness which has the effect of repelling us from Him. We picture to ourselves a frowning God, and feel an inclination, which we cannot resist, to turn away from the contemplation of His character. We seek a

refuge from an angry Jehovah in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we regard as a Saviour of boundless compassion, tenderness, and love. A contrast is thus formed between God the Father and God the Son, which is at once deeply dishonouring to the first person of the Trinity, most disastrous to the comfort of the believer, and especially calculated to retard the work of sanctification in the minds and hearts of God's people. Such a view of the Father is also eminently dangerous as regards the unconverted; for it has a natural and necessary tendency to deter them from coming to God to seek for salvation.

It is distressing to think that a sentiment so dishonouring to God, so destructive of the believer's comfort, so adverse to his growth in grace, and so manifestly calculated to prevent the unconverted sinner from coming to God the Father, should have been entertained and expressed by some of our most distinguished divines. And to make the matter worse, the erroneous sentiment is embodied in the hymns of some of our most popular psalmodists,—men whose songs are sung in all our places of public

worship. Even Dr Watts himself, the sweetest of all our uninspired singers in Israel, gives his sanction to the unscriptural notion to which we refer, in many of his beautiful poetic effusions. It were easy to quote passages from many of his hymns in which he gives expression to the sentiment, that there was nothing in the heart of God but unmingled wrath towards all the descendants of Adam, until Christ interposed on our behalf, and turned the anger of the Father away from us. The love of the Father is thus made to be the effect of the voluntary offer which the Son made to give Himself up a sacrifice for our sins. One quotation from Watts, illustrative of the erroneous sentiment, that God was at one time implacable towards our race, and only at last became appeased by Christ's earnest and persevering prayers on our behalf, is all that it will be necessary to give. In his hundred and eighth hymn, in the Second Book, he thus expresses himself:—

“Once 'twas a seat of dreadful wrath,
And shot devouring flame;
Our God appear'd consuming fire,
And Vengeance was His name.

“ Rich were the drops of Jesus' blood,
That calm'd His frowning face,
That sprinkled o'er the burning throne
And turn'd the wrath to grace.”

In these lines there is an awful misconception of divine truth. Other theological writers, no less eminent than Dr Watts, have expressed themselves on the same subject in language equally objectionable. Jonathan Edwards, in his “History of Redemption,” speaks in that able, and, with few exceptions, judicious work, of Christ having *purchased* the love of God towards us. Other divines, some of whom stand at the head of the evangelical school, represent the love of the Father as the fruit of the voluntary substitution of the Son. The love of God is spoken of by others as having been *caused* by the interposition of Christ on our behalf, instead of Christ's substitution being the effect of the love of the first person in the Trinity.

In other words, the scheme of man's redemption is represented as having originated, not with God the Father, but with Christ the Son. Nothing could be more opposed to the fact; nothing could be more at variance with the whole tenor

of the teachings of Scripture on the subject. The consequences of such a belief cannot fail to be most derogatory to the character of God in the eyes of His creatures, and most disastrous as regards themselves. Such a representation of God must, so long as it is regarded as correct, deepen and perpetuate that estrangement from Him which is natural to us all. It is inexpressibly painful to believe, that there ever could have been a period in the eternity which is past, at which God did not feel the outgoings of an infinite affection towards us. It would not be easy—indeed, it would not be possible—to imagine anything more calculated to extinguish our love to the Father where it exists, or to prevent its being implanted in the heart where it does not, than the reflection that His love to us was not eternal; for it could not have been from everlasting, were the theory we are combating in accordance with Scripture.

But happily the hypothesis is wholly without foundation. It has not the semblance of a basis on which to rest. Not one solitary passage in the inspired Volume can be adduced

which gives even a seeming sanction to it. On the other hand, the holy oracles abound with passages which in the most explicit and emphatic manner assert and illustrate the very opposite sentiment. There never was a time—no, not a moment, in the councils of eternity—when an intention or purpose existed in the mind of God that His fallen creatures should be left to perish. There never was a period in which He did not love and compassionate ourselves, though necessarily always hating our sins. His love to us was not *caused* by the interposition of Christ on our behalf; Christ's interposition was, on the contrary, the *effect* of the Father's love. God's grace was not *purchased* by Christ. If, indeed, it had been so, it would have ceased to be grace. The love, the grace, the pity afterwards so marvellously manifested towards us, existed in the mind of the Father from all eternity. Instead of Christ being the procuring cause of the love of God, He simply, by the substitution of Himself in our room, opened up a way whereby God could, consistently with His law and justice, give an expression or manifestation of that love towards His fallen creatures, which was

alike eternal and infinite. Justice forbade any practical exhibition of the love of God towards our ruined race, until an ample reparation had been made to that law which, in the persons of our first parents, we had all so fearfully violated. Such reparation was made prospectively when Jesus voluntary undertook to become incarnate, to obey, to suffer, and to die in our nature and our room. *Then* the Father could furnish the universe with an expression or manifestation of His eternal love and compassion to our race; and then, accordingly, a proclamation of mercy was, for the first time, made to a world weltering in its blood.

On a theme so very solemn and mysterious, it behoves ignorant and fallible creatures to speak with profound reverence, and with the utmost circumspection. We feel that we are not acting inconsistently with this frame of mind, when we say that we can conceive it quite possible that God could have loved us from all eternity, as well as infinitely, even had Christ not undertaken to become incarnate, and to suffer, and to die for us; only in that case there could have been no manifestation, no expression

of the Father's love. God's compassion towards us would have been quite compatible with our being left to perish in our guilt, inasmuch as His justice would have interposed an insuperable obstacle to the practical exhibition of His love and pity, so long as no reparation had been made to the law which we had violated.

This view of the commingling of the divine attributes of love and pity with the attribute of justice, is daily illustrated in the administration of our judicial affairs. There is no sight more common than that of an earthly judge shewing the deepest compassion for the poor criminal trembling at the bar—even shedding tears in profusion for the guilty and unhappy man, when passing sentence on him. Still the law must be allowed to take its course. The claims of justice must be asserted. Its inexorable exactions must be complied with. The punishment must be, and is, inflicted. In like manner, it can easily be conceived that God might from all eternity have loved and pitied our fallen race, and yet not been morally able to prove in a practical manner His love and His pity, because no adequate atonement had been made for our

guilt. With all reverence be it spoken, God is necessarily guided in His government of the world by certain fixed moral principles, just as the judges of the land regulate their proceedings by those clearly defined and universally recognised principles which form an essential part of the British constitution. As a moral governor, therefore, He could not manifest love in a practical manner, or extend mercy, to creatures who had revolted against Him, without an adequate reparation being made for the outrage which we had committed on His authority. On the contrary supposition, His compassion would have been exercised towards us at the expense of His justice. But an atonement *has* been made. The law's demands have been met. Justice can exact no more; and therefore a way has been opened up through which the love and pity of God towards His rebel creatures on earth can be manifested in their salvation. Christ hath suffered in our room. He bare our sins in His own body on the tree, and therefore God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly.

It cannot be too often or too emphatically repeated, that scriptural views on this moment-

ous matter are of the greatest importance. As has been already remarked, they very deeply involve the glory of God the Father, and have a close and constant bearing on the holiness and happiness of His people. Those who have fallen into the error which we are seeking to expose, generally do so from confounding the sinner with his sins. God ever has been, and, of necessity, ever must be, angry with sin; but that does not imply anger towards the sinner himself. Love and compassion for a fallen creature are perfectly reconcilable with indignation at his sins. If God could not love us while in our sins, He never could have loved us at all. But He did love us while in our sins, and hath manifested His love, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. He loved us from all eternity; and it cannot be too often reiterated that His love was wholly spontaneous. It was not purchased by anything which Christ did in the councils of eternity, or undertook to accomplish. It had no other cause than in the Father's own sovereign, eternal pleasure.

And it is to this eternal, uncaused, unpurchased love of God that we owe the glorious

scheme of redemption. That wondrous plan^s was of God's devising. It originated entirely^e in the mind of the Father. This is a truth o^s inexpressible importance, and of unutterabl^s sweetness to the believer. Let us endeavour to^f make it clear as the light of the meridian sun^f in order that we may hold it fast, and continu^b ally realise its consoling and sanctifying power. Blessed be God, there is no truth within the^b compass of divine revelation which admits of^b more ample or more conclusive proof. Let us^t seek to pour upon it a portion of that flood of^e light with which it is so largely illuminated^t throughout the Word of God. Let us endeavour^b to make the fact so clear, that no simple-minded^t Christian can ever hereafter entertain any doubt on the subject,—that the birthplace of the scheme of man's salvation was in the deepest recesses of the Father's loving heart; and that, so far from Christ kindling in the heart of God that boundless love wherewith He has loved us, He but furnished the Father with an opportunity of practically manifesting the love to a lost world, which glowed in His bosom from all eternity.

First of all, then, let it be remarked, that it

as God himself who said, when consulting with the Father in the councils of eternity as to how a rebel world could be restored to the possession of the Divine favour, "Deliver from going down to the pit; for I have found a ransom." This is the first intimation which is made to us of the plan of redemption through Christ. The words are remarkable. God is the speaker, and He says, "*I* have found a ransom." The term "found" clearly implies that He had been *seeking* to find a ransom. In the unfathomable depths of the deliberations which had been going on in His own infinite and eternal mind, He had been considering how a rebel race could be rescued from the dismal doom to which they had subjected themselves, and from which they could not escape by any other means than the exhibition of Almighty power. His holiness and His justice required that satisfaction should be made for the outrage which had been committed by these essential attributes of His nature. If, with the deepest awe on our spirits, we may use the expression,—it was while God was apparently for a little moment at a loss as to how He could savingly manifest His love and compas-

sion to His fallen creatures, and yet the demand of a broken law be fully met, that Christ came spontaneously forward, and offered to become our substitute. "Lo, here am I, send me" were the gracious words of Jesus; words which plainly imply that God was at that very moment most anxious to rescue our ruined race. "Send me!" As if Jesus had said to God, "You are looking out for a way whereby sinners may be saved, and be restored to the favour which they have forfeited; I willingly and joyfully undertake to assume their nature, and to obey the law on their behalf, and to suffer and die in their stead. Send me!"

So, again, we see the same glorious truth, that man's redemption originated in the mind of God the Father, as the fruit of His infinite and eternal love to us, brought out with surpassing clearness, when the Lord Jesus, in the remote ages of a past eternity, addressed Him in the words, "Lo, I come: I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is in my heart." Nothing could be more evident from the texts just quoted than the fact that God, previous, if we may speak, to this period in the annals of eternity,

willed the salvation of the human race; at least, of as many as should be by His grace in time disposed to receive salvation from Him. It was to do the *will* of His Father, as will hereafter be fully shewn, that Christ came into the world in the fulness of time, and in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin to offer the sacrifice of Himself. God's law is declared to be written in the Redeemer's heart; the law, in this case, meaning the purpose or pleasure of God respecting the salvation of a lost world.

Again, we are told from the lips of God himself, in Jeremiah, in the third verse of the thirty-first chapter, that He has loved His people with an everlasting love, and that therefore with loving-kindness had He drawn them; so that there never was a moment in the eternity that is past, in which God did not love His people; while the expression, "with loving-kindness have I drawn thee," manifestly points to His devising the plan of their redemption, and seeing that glorious plan carried into execution.

Let it also be ever remembered, that GOD IS LOVE. His name and His nature are love, a fact which necessarily involves the idea that

His love was eternal,—co-existent, speaking after the manner of men, with His own being. Consequently the love of God could not have been caused, procured, or purchased by anything said or done on the part of Christ. So far, indeed, from Jesus having kindled the flame of infinite affection which burns in the bosom of God towards us, it was because God *so* loved the world, that Christ came down from heaven to die for us. “In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world to be a propitiation for our sins.”

Equally conclusive, in proof both of the eternity of the Father's love and of His having devised a way whereby its blessed effects might be enjoyed by us, is that most delightful and precious passage of scriptural truth in the third chapter and sixteenth verse of the Gospel by John, where we are told that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” What language could more fully or more forcibly express the great truth that God loved the world in His

to our own eternal mind, and that the advent of Christ to our earth was the consequence and not the cause of that great love wherewith He has loved us?

The eternity of the Father's love, and His authorship of the scheme of man's redemption, are likewise very explicitly set forth in the fifth chapter and nineteenth verse of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, where God is represented as being in Christ, or through Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing to men their trespasses. It is true that this work of reconciling sinners to Himself can only take place in time; yet it is no less clear, that what is done in time by the Father, must be the consequence of what He predetermined should be done from all eternity. The Word of God is most explicit on this point,—that everything which comes to pass was foreordained from all eternity by the Father.

Reference has already been made to the uniform testimony of Scripture to the fact, that God loved His people from all eternity. It is not necessary to multiply passages to the same effect. Two or three will suffice in addition to

the one already given, wherein it is said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." In harmony with this are the passages,— "His mercies are *from* everlasting" as well as "to everlasting on all that fear him;" "Whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Here the predestination and the foreknowledge are contemporaneous: and as God's foreknowledge was necessarily from all eternity, so His predestinating or electing love must have been also eternal. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us and chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, and predestinated us into the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." Here we not only have God represented as having from eternity chosen His people to salvation, but as having done it according to the good pleasure of His will—words which conclusively prove that the plan of man's salvation originated solely

in the mind of the Father from all eternity. He was under no constraint to love us, otherwise than that which was moral and innate in Himself. He loved us with a perfect spontaneity of affection. He was not moved to the love with which He regarded us in eternity; He loved us because it so seemed good in His sight. In happy keeping with the passages we have quoted is that portion of the inspired book wherein we are told that it is "according to the eternal purpose which he (God the Father) purposed *in* Christ," that sinners are saved. God's purpose, therefore, to save a ruined race was not, as before remarked, the effect of the interposition and entreaties of Christ on our behalf, but was formed from all eternity in the Father's own mind, and was to be manifested in the fulness of time in the person and work of His Son. We are moreover told, that eternal life was in the Father, and was manifested unto us by His Son,—thus making it as clear as it were possible for any combination of words to do, that the eternal life which is synonymous with salvation, had its origin in God's own loving heart.

Much and most conclusive evidence of the

same unspeakably precious truth yet remains to be adduced. This we shall afterwards lay before our readers, because we regard the doctrine of the eternity of God's love, and the plan of the world's redemption being traceable to the spontaneous workings of His own infinite mind, as so important, that neither the sinner nor the saint, the unconverted nor the believer, can be too firmly established in it. Though God the Father, as already mentioned, hates the sins of the sinner, and if he die impenitent will hate and punish himself through all eternity, yet God has from all eternity had compassion on a world lying in wickedness, and provided a Saviour for the rescue of all who are willing to accept salvation. It is, therefore, the sinner's own fault if he eventually perish in his guilt.

With regard again to believers, they never can enjoy that communion with God the Father which is so essential to their comfort and progress in the divine life, and which is more or less the privilege of all who are converted, unless their minds be entirely delivered from the bondage necessarily caused by that view of the character

of God which represents Him as never having had any compassion or love for His creatures, until the Lord Jesus, by earnest and persevering entreaties, pacified Him towards us, and changed a frowning face to a smiling countenance. If we would think of God under the influence of filial feelings, if we would at all times approach Him as dear children, we must regard Him as having been our Father and our Friend from all eternity, though His parental regards were not unfolded until that era, in the councils of eternity, when Christ offered to become a sacrifice for us; and thus, by engaging to meet every claim which a violated law could prefer against us, opened up a door for the practical exhibition of that love wherewith God loved us from all eternity. May we all meditate more frequently, and we shall do so more sweetly, on that greatest and most glorious of all truths,—that God loved us and felt compassion for us from all eternity; and that to the Father's eternal and infinite love towards sinners, we owe the existence of that wondrous plan of salvation which the angels desired to look into from before the foundation

of the world, and which will be the subject of admiration, adoration, and amazement to all the hosts of heaven, throughout that eternity into which, ere long, we shall be introduced.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

IN our last chapter we adduced a variety of arguments to prove that the love wherewith God loveth His people was eternal and spontaneous, instead of being, as some say, the effects of Christ's interposition in the councils of eternity on our behalf. We have also shewn that God was the author of the plan of salvation. As the subject is one of unutterable importance, and has so immediate and powerful an influence on the holiness and happiness of believers, it may be well to advert to other passages of Scripture which have a blessed bearing upon it.

Less directly, perhaps, but not less clearly is God's authorship of the plan of salvation, as the effect of His love, set forth in those passages of the sacred volume in which the Lord Jesus is spoken of as the *gift* of God, and as being *sent*

by Him into the world, that the world may be saved by Him. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." And so in that passage, quoted in the previous chapter, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "He hath made," or given, "him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up," or gave him, "for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" "Whom God hath set forth," or given, "to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;"—which words manifestly mean, that God did spontaneously love us from everlasting, and that in the councils of eternity He resolved on giving His Son, in the fulness of time, to die for sinners.

And here it may be remarked by way of parenthesis, that God not only gave His Son to redeem the world, but He hath given to Him all who shall believe on His name to the remotest period of time. "My Father, who gave them me, is greater

than I ; and none shall be able to pluck them out of my Father's hand ;" " That of all that the Father hath given me, I should lose nothing ;" " I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me ;" " Keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me ;" " All that the Father hath given to me, shall come to me, and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out ;" " As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him ;" " I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world : thine they were, and thou gavest them me ; and they have kept thy word." " Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am." In all these, and many other passages which might be quoted, it is made as clear as anything could be, that as all believers were given by the Father to the Son, the scheme of salvation must have originated in the mind and heart of God from all eternity.

The same most precious truth is beautifully and fully unfolded in those passages of Scripture in which the Lord Jesus is represented as having been sent by God the Father into the world for

the purpose of accomplishing the redemption of mankind. The mission of Christ to our earth was not, strictly speaking, a self-appointed one. He was appointed to it by the Father, and hence He invariably speaks of His incarnation and appearance in our world as the results of God's good pleasure. The most remarkable statement of Jesus in reference to this point is that in which He says, "I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me." To the same effect the Lord Jesus repeatedly expressed Himself in the days of His sojourn on earth, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work;" "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who hath sent him;" "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation;" "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father who sent me;" "The works that I do, bear witness that the Father has sent me;" "No one can come unto me except the Father who hath sent me draw him;" "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me;" "I must work the works of him that sent me;" "But now I go my way to him that sent me;" "Whom the Father hath

sanctified and sent into the world ;” “ That they may believe that thou has sent me ;” “ He that heareth me, seeth him that sent me ;” “ For I have not spoken of myself ; but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak ;” “ The word is not mine, but my Father's who sent me ;” “ Because they know not him that sent me ;” “ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent ;” “ As thou has sent me into the world, so have I sent them into the world ;” “ That the world may believe that thou hast sent me ;” “ That the world may know that thou hast sent me ;” “ And these have known that thou hast sent me ;” “ As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

And in a variety of other passages the same truth is set forth through the medium of the apostles of our Lord. A few instances will suffice. “ God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world ; but that the world through him might be saved ;” “ He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God ;” “ God sent forth his Son, made under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the curse of the law ;” “ God sent his only begotten

Son into the world, that the world through him might be saved ;” “ God sent forth his Son to be a propitiation for our sins ;” “ For him whom he hath sent have you believed not ;” “ That ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”

But we need not proceed further in our proofs that the scheme of salvation had its origin in the heart of God from all eternity, and that it solely emanated from the infinite love and compassion with which He regarded us millions of ages before the foundations of the world were laid. It is most important it should be believed, that Christ did not reconcile God to us, but that He merely provided a means whereby the loving heart of a loving God could be unfolded to us in all its infinitude of affection.

The glory of God, as has been before remarked, is eminently involved in our having right views on this point. Nothing could be more dishonouring to the Father than to regard Him as a being who was implacable towards us until the Son interposed on our behalf. It dims the glory of God's love to a degree which it is awful to contemplate, to regard it as a purchased love. It is painful, as we have said before, to

think that ever such a sentiment should have been for a moment entertained by a child of God.

And it cannot be repeated too often, that the sentiment is no less destructive of the Christian's own comfort, and inimical to his progress in holiness; for how can any one love God and be happy in Him, as all Christians ought, who can go back to a period in eternity when he was not the object of God's love, and when he further believes that God never would have loved him, had not Christ caused or procured His love? Love to God is the mainspring of holiness; but God cannot be regarded with the same affection by those who represent His love to the world as having been contingent on something done on the part of Christ, as by those who trace all their blessings in time, and their salvation in eternity, to the free, spontaneous love of a loving God. "We love him because he first loved us;" but if we believe that that love was not spontaneous, but was caused by the proffered sacrifice of His Son, our hearts never can go out to Him in those overflowing feelings of affection with which it is alike the duty and the happiness of all His people to regard Him. And were it pos-

sible, which, blessed be His name, it is not, for any one to carry the same views regarding the origin of the plan of man's redemption with him to heaven, he would feel unable to engage with the same cordiality and delight as the rest of the ransomed throng, in those ascriptions of praise to God the Father with which the celestial regions will ever ring, and of which ascriptions the chief will be—"Not unto us, O Lord, nor unto us, but unto thy name be the glory." All the saints of God now sing, "Oh, to grace"—to God the Father's free, uninfluenced grace—"how great a debtor!" but the redeemed and glorified multitude which no man can number, will sing that song in far loftier and louder strains, because they will then have much clearer views of the free, unpurchased, innate love of God, than they ever could have had on earth. They will trace all that they are, and all that they ever will be—all the happiness they enjoy, and all the glory to which they look forward—far as the eye can reach through the vista of eternity, to the infinite, spontaneous love of the Father, felt in all its overflowing fulness, unnumbered ages before the worlds were formed.

CHAPTER III.

THE FATHER'S LOVE AS DISPLAYED IN BEING HIS PEOPLE'S GOD.

IN the two preceding chapters we have endeavoured to prove that God's love to His people was from all eternity; we have also sought to shew that the great plan of man's salvation originated spontaneously and entirely in the mind of God the Father, and that consequently our redemption could not be, as some, by a strange misapprehension of revealed truth, have said it is,—the effect of the Saviour's undertaking our otherwise hopeless cause. We have likewise shewn, that the love of God to His people was eternal, and altogether irrespective of His Son's interposition on their behalf. In order to place this glorious and gracious truth in a light so clear as that the simplest-minded Christian may be able to comprehend it, the

fact was dwelt upon with all the emphasis which we could give to our words,—that if Jesus had never voluntarily offered to become our Saviour, by taking our nature on Him, and obeying and dying in our stead, the love of God to His creatures would have been as great as now—revealed as it is in the person and work of the Redeemer—perceive it to be. The difference would simply have been, that, in the supposed case, we should have had no manifestation of the Father's love, and never could, in any way, have benefited from it. Though His love was infinite, yet so were His holiness and justice; and these, without the spontaneous offer of the Son to become our substitute, would have interposed insuperable and eternal barriers to the practical exhibition of the love of God towards us. God foresaw and felt this in all its force. And it was because He did so, that all the resources of His infinite mind, if we may so express ourselves, were put forth in the discovery of a plan whereby those obstacles to the exhibition of His love might be removed. There was only one way in which this could be done. Even infinite Wisdom—we say it with all reverence—

would devise no other. That wondrous way lay in the fact of Christ taking our nature upon Him, uniting it to His divine essence, and then bearing in His own person the punishment due to our sins. Knowing what was in the merciful mind and loving heart of the Father, Christ freely offered to comply with the conditions which the holiness and justice of God exacted ; and, in due time, carried His engagements on our behalf into full effect.

This view of the character of God, this unfolding of His fatherly heart towards His creatures, is one which is eminently calculated to inspire filial emotions in the hearts of all His people. To trace back the authorship of the plan of salvation to Him alone, and to realise the great truth, that His love to our ruined race was not purchased nor caused in any way by what Christ did or undertook to do for us, are considerations which are especially adapted to minister comfort to God's people, and to draw out their hearts in holy affection and gratitude to Him. But it is not enough for believers that they should thus be assured of the unbought and perfectly spontaneous love of God from all

eternity, and through all the eternity that is past,—they need no less, if they would joy and rejoice in Him, that they should be also assured of His *love to them in time*. There is much danger of this assurance experiencing a great diminution, if it do not at times well-nigh expire entirely, and leave the soul in the depths of a distress so great as to verge on despair. It is only as the people of God are led to realise a present sense of His *present* love, that they can know what true comfort means. His past love, His love in the eternity that, if we may so speak, has vanished away, is only the source of solace and support when they can clearly and closely connect it with His present favour,—His love to them in time. We cannot live on the past alone. If we lose the sense of God's affection for us at the present moment, our impression of what His love was to us in the by-gone eternity—were it possible that He could have loved us once and cease to love us now—would fail to afford the slightest comfort. It would, indeed, have the very opposite effect. It would fearfully add to our wretchedness. It would more densely darken, more intensely deepen,

our despair. What could be more terrible than to have the conviction resting on the mind, that God once loved us, but loves us no longer? The misery of the man who never believed himself to be the object of the Divine regard in that special sense in which God loves His people, as contradistinguished from His general goodness or providential kindness to His creatures, would, in its terrible intensity, surpass the wretchedness arising from any other source which the mind could conceive. Hence, not to have had a treasure of inestimable value, and which others around us possess, were bad enough; but to have possessed that treasure, and to have been deprived of it, would be the very consummation of human misery.

It becomes, then, on every account, a matter of inexpressible importance, that God's people should seek, by every means in their power, to realise habitually a sense of His love towards them in time. And what a mercy it is that the proofs and manifestations that God *does* love His saints in time are so great and manifold! It were difficult to say whether they be more numerous or complete. What a blessed thing

that they are both numerous and marked—most numerous and most marked. Both Testaments are crowded with them; and the powers of language seem to become exhausted in setting them forth. You cannot open a page of the inspired volume without meeting with tokens, examples, and assurances of God's present love to His saints,—His love to them at this moment and at every moment.

The variety of ways in which God unfolds the present overflowings of His affection for His people, is no less remarkable. What He is represented as being to His saints, and they to Him—the relations He sustains to them, and they to God—the tender images or emblems employed to set His affection forth—the direct assurances of His love—and the exhibition of that love in the mission of Jesus Christ into our world,—all, all conspire, in a most wondrous way, to bring before the saints of God, in a manner the most vivid, the love with which He regards them in time. As these are matters which so largely involve the glory of God, and have so important and direct a bearing on the edification, the growth in grace, and the comfort of all believers, we shall

endeavour, in dependence on that Divine aid which is promised to all who sincerely seek it, to enter, in some measure, into the glorious theme. It is but little that can be done by any human pen to set forth the great love wherewith God has loved us, either as regards eternity or time, but that little may be blessed to many a troubled soul. It may speak comfort to many a saint who, because his views of the present love of God are dark, goes a-mourning all the day long.

First of all, then, in speaking of what God is represented as being to His saints, let us especially direct our thoughts to that boundless display of His love which is made in those portions of His Word in which He speaks of Himself *as the God of His people*. The full import of the gracious phrase will never be seen or felt in this world, neither will it in the world which is to come. Many saints who have walked closely with God, and been privileged to enjoy intimate and sustained communion with Him, have had most precious perceptions of the fulness of blessing there is in it; but though much may be learned in this life of what an amount of meaning there is in the engagement of God to be a God to His

people, they have but very feeble glimpses of the grace and glory there are in the words. They but see as through a glass darkly what there is contained in the words, "I will be to you a God, and ye shall be to me a people." Every new act of intercourse with God increases the saint's knowledge of what is involved in the words which have just been quoted; but at the last hour of his life, as on the day of his conversion, he will find that what he knows of the latent significance there is in the covenant engagement of God to be His people's God, will not bear the same comparison to what there is in it, which a grain of sand bears to innumerable worlds, were they all condensed into one. Nor, as has been remarked, will eternity itself fully reveal the import of the words that God is our God. Though our capacity in the world of spirits will be enlarged beyond all conception, it will be altogether inadequate to grapple with the blessed theme. And though, after countless millions of ages have melted away into the eternity that is past, and the glorified saints have been all the while, without one moment's intermission, occupied in meditating on the import of the assurance, "I will be

to you a God," they shall still find, that, so far from having fathomed the depths of grace and glory there are in those words, they have scarcely penetrated the surface. That is one of the great truths which, in all their blessedness, will never be apprehended by any finite mind. God alone knows what is included in having Him for *our* God.

Only *try*, with such natural powers and such a spiritual capacity as God has given you, to grasp what is contained in His gracious promise to be your God. He is the source of all good; therefore every good is guaranteed to you. You may not, with your present spiritual vision, so sadly impaired by sin, be always able to discern the proofs of God's goodness in what befalls you in your journey through life; but in every incident, which is not the fruit of the saint's own folly, that occurs to him on his earthly pilgrimage, the goodness of God is most surely to be found, even though he discerns it not. Everything, as the apostle assures us, is among the *all* things which work together for the good of God's people. It were impossible, indeed, to be otherwise. How could it, when all the perfec-

tions of the Deity are, in a sense, His people's? If God be their God, then His infinite wisdom—that wisdom which cannot err—is theirs, and is pledged for their present safety and their ultimate salvation. So, too, is His infinite knowledge. His boundless wisdom involves the right exercise of His illimitable knowledge. No less is the almighty power of God pledged for the security, in this world, of all His saints, and for their perfect happiness in the world to come. They have enemies within and without, powerful as well as numerous; but they are all, collectively, no less than individually, the veriest pigmies in strength, as compared with God's power. Equally can His people rely on His faithfulness. His immutability is theirs: He changes not. They change with every succeeding hour—He, never. His people have His own word for that; and what more would they have? "I am the Lord that changeth not." Every word, therefore, which He hath spoken of good concerning His people will be kept; every promise He has made to them will be fulfilled. He appealed, through His servants of old, to His ancient people the Jews, whether every good word which He had

spoken to them had not been brought to pass. And there was an affirmative response to the appeal in every heart. So will He appeal to us in heaven, and ask us whether every good word, of all that the Lord our God had spoken to us when passing through the wilderness of this world, had not been fulfilled. And from the depths of every heart in that vast throng—a throng which no man will be able to number—there will come gushing out, in glad and grateful accents, an affirmative answer.

There is such an inexhaustible fulness of blessing in God's gracious representations of Himself as being the God of His people, that while it would extend this chapter beyond all reasonable limits to transfer to our pages all such representations, it must be eminently conducive to the comfort of God's people to refer to a few of those passages, where they occupy a particularly prominent place in the Divine Word. The frequency with which they occur, and the emphasis by which they are characterised, add much to their blessedness and importance.

The first intimation which God made to His

fallen creatures, that He would have mercy upon them, is to be found in the promise which He gave, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. But the attribute of mere mercy is very different from that of love. Mercy might be extended to the guilty without the party exercising it feeling any affection for its objects. We hear of persons pardoning those by whom they have been offended, but declining to have any intercourse with them, or in any way to shew them further friendship. And the promise alluded to pointed, as those to whom it was addressed would have understood it, to an exemption from the penal consequences of their apostasy, rather than to their restoration to the lost favour of God. We know that the latter was involved in the promise, but we are speaking of what would be the construction which would naturally, in the first instance, be put upon the words. The earliest announcement made by God to His creatures, which was directly calculated to unfold the affection with which He regarded them, and consequently to draw out their affections to Him, is recorded in the seventeenth chapter and seventh verse of Genesis,

where, addressing Abraham, He said, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Here, in the very first intimation which God made to His creatures, that He would be a God unto them, there is something which is eminently indicative of His goodness and condescension. We see Him stooping, as it were, from His throne of glory to enter into a relationship with His creatures on earth. He speaks to Abraham, as if the father of the faithful were on a footing of equality with Himself—"I will establish a covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee." Wondrous condescension! Amazing love! "And I will be a God unto thee." What must have passed in the mind of Abraham when God thus addressed him, it is impossible for us to conceive. He must have been overwhelmed with amazement, and his heart profoundly touched with gratitude and gladness, as the gracious relationship which had been established between God and himself, was brought before him. And that which God thus revealed Himself as being to

Abraham, He is still to His people. He was their God—He is, Christian reader, *your* God.

The frequency with which God, in the Old Testament, reveals Himself to His people as being their God, shews that He regards the expression as one which is the fullest of import and blessing which He could employ when speaking to men. In it, as already remarked, is centred all that is good, for the term "God" is but another name for infinite goodness. The pledge which God gave His people to be their God occurs three times in the two last brief verses of the twenty-ninth chapter of Exodus. Speaking to them He says, "And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be *their* God. And they shall know that I am the Lord *their* God, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord *their* God." And so, in the book of Leviticus, in the twenty-sixth chapter and the twelfth and thirteenth verses, though consisting only of a few words, the expression occurs twice, "I will walk among you, and will be *your* God, and ye shall be my people. I am the Lord *your* God." There are other passages in the same and

two succeeding books, in which every second or third verse concludes with the words, "I am the Lord your God;" thereby very emphatically expressing the greatness of His love to His people, and His providential care over them.

Passing over other intermediate portions of the Scriptures in which the same truth is brought out, let us fix our attention on its developments, as these are to be found in the seventh chapter of Deuteronomy—"For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself;" "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God;" "If ye hearken to these judgments, and keep and do them, the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers;" "Thou shalt well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt;" "The mighty hand, and the stretched-out arm, whereby the Lord thy God brought thee out; so shall the Lord thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid. Moreover, the Lord thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide them-

selves from thee, be destroyed ;” “The Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible. And the Lord thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little ;” “The Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee.” In the succeeding chapter, the same expression occurs with even greater frequency, indicating, as before observed, that God regards it as the most assuring and endearing language which He could employ in speaking to His people. In three successive verses, the fifth, sixth, and seventh, the words occur, “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land ; a land of brooks of water, of fountains, and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.” It will be observed here, that God connects His being their God with the chastening which, in His love, He sends to His people ; a circumstance which shews what a boundless blessing is involved in the expression. It is true, that many of the passages which have

been quoted, have a primary reference to God's temporal relations to the people of Israel; but it is no less true, that every temporal blessing bestowed on them, and every temporal good promised to them, was typical in the highest degree of God's purposes to, and dealings with, His spiritual Israel.

The book of Joshua abounds with similar assurances from God to His people, that He was and would be their God; and, in the intervening books, till we come to the Psalms, there often occur the same words. But these we pass over, in order that the attention of the reader may be especially directed to the exceeding frequency with which the words are, by implication, to be found, when the Psalmist, in response to God calling Himself His people's God, addresses Him as His God. This language, on the part of David, pervades the whole of his precious hymns of praise. But to that fact it is not necessary to allude now, as it will be requisite to recur to it hereafter. At present I content myself with simply inviting the reader's attention to the book of Psalms, in connexion with this point.

The further we proceed in the books of the Old Testament, we discern fuller and sweeter developments of the love and goodness which are contained in the assurance given by God, that He will be a God to His people. In the first verse of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, there is a striking exemplification of what has been already said respecting the blessedness which is bound up in this assurance, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God," is the language which the prophet here employs. Observe the close connexion between the comfort of the saints, and their having God for their God, which is here so emphatically expressed. And as if to shew still more strikingly the intimate connexion that exists between our having God for our God, and our enjoyment of consolation, He immediately repeats the word "comfort!" "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Not less blessedly is the same delightful truth brought out in the forty-first chapter and tenth verse of the same prophet—"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God." The most advanced believers have their seasons of timidity, brought on by days of darkness, arising

from the feebleness of their faith. They sensibly feel their own helplessness, and forget that their strength is in God. In such seasons they are assailed by fears and apprehensions. To them God says at such moments, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God." As if He had said, "Having me for your God, what more can you want? If I am yours, surely, by the knowledge of that great fact, your fears ought at once to be dispelled, your doubts all dispersed, and your spirits brought into a state of perfect peace."

In the thirty-fourth chapter and twenty-fourth verse of the prophet Ezekiel, we find a gracious intimation made by God to His people, in harmony with those passages which we have quoted from preceding books—"I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them." And again, in the same chapter, and at the thirty-first verse, God says, "Ye, my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord." That God means to indicate the great tenderness of His heart towards His saints, by the words, "I am your God," may be inferred from the loving language He employs

immediately before, when He says, "Ye, my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men." The relationship which He is here represented as bearing to His people is that of a shepherd, which, in eastern countries, is particularly full of meaning. It expresses an unceasing and most watchful care blended with tender affection.

Still more fully is the greatness of the blessing included in having God for our God, made apparent when we come down to the New Testament. If God be ours, He necessarily dwells with us, and in us. Amazing condescension! Unutterable goodness! The great Creator dwelling with, and in His creatures! Were we not emphatically and explicitly assured by God himself that it is so, it would be presumption of the most daring kind to conceive the possibility of such an intimate relationship between the holy Jehovah and sinful men. The Apostle Paul, in the sixth chapter and sixteenth verse of the second Epistle to the Corinthians, connects the indwelling of God in the hearts of believers with His being their God, and thereby throws a flood of light on the full import of the latter words: "Ye are," he says, "the temple of the living

God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." The same idea of God being the God of His people, seems to have been one which had taken deep hold of the apostle's mind, and one on which he felt a peculiar pleasure in dwelling; for, when he refers to it, it is always in connexion with something else indicative of special blessing from God. Look, for an instance of this, at that passage in the eighth chapter and tenth verse of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where God connects His being His people's God with putting His laws into their minds, and writing them in their hearts. "I will," saith He, "put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." God could impart no greater blessing to His creatures than to put His laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts; for with the remembrance, the love, and the practice of His holy and righteous laws, there is indissolubly blended all that can conduce to man's happiness here, and insure his perfect and perpetual bliss hereafter.

I will make only one more reference to the love of God to His people, as illustrated by the revelation of Himself which He has made to them, as being their God. But that reference is a most precious one. No Christian would consent to its being expunged from the Divine Word for anything which this world could give in exchange. I allude to that touching incident in the history of Jesus, after He had risen from the dead, and appeared to Mary. In the overflowing fulness of her affection, she would have embraced her Lord, but He did not countenance any external exhibition of her regard for Him. On the contrary, He discouraged it. "Touch me not," He said in tender accents to Mary, who was overjoyed that she had once more seen Him whom her soul loved; "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go unto my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; unto my God, and your God." If the lips of Him who never spoke in other than tones of the tenderest affection towards His disciples, employed the phrase "your God," at one of the most interesting moments which characterise His sojourn on

earth, and that, too, when the other words, "My Father, and your Father," and "My brethren," were peculiarly tender and affectionate as coming from Him—surely no Christian can fail to discern in the fact that God is his God, a source of inexpressible and unfailling joy.

That the assurance of God being our God is eminently adapted to solace the soul in seasons of sorrow, and to strengthen it in those periods of weakness which every believer has to deplore, is made still more manifest by the fact to which a passing reference has already been made. I allude to the frequency with which the words occur in the Scriptures. Perhaps no other words, relative to God the Father, are to be so often met with. The fact shews how important God himself regards that manifestation of His character to His people. In connexion with this point, it will be further apparent, that, instead of the assurance being given through the medium of His prophets and servants, it is almost invariably given directly by God himself. Not only is He the subject of the message, but it is delivered by Himself. He speaks in His own, or the first person: "*I* will be your God."

It cannot be necessary to add, that that which is thus known to be regarded as peculiarly important by God, ought to be no less so by His people. He meant this particular representation of His character to be one especially indicative of the love which He bears to His saints, and the unceasing and profound interest He takes in them. And surely we ought to respond to this representation of the views and wishes of God; we ought to receive all His revelations of Himself in the manner in which He means them to be received; and if we but so regard the fact of God being our God, we shall have most blessed apprehensions of His character—views of what He is to us, which shall contribute largely to His glory, and eminently conduce to our comfort and holiness here, while they will meeten us for the perfect purity and endless bliss of the heavenly state hereafter.

But the graciousness of God's character, as implied in the expression, "I will be your God," is made still more clear by those other words with which it is so frequently followed, "*And ye shall be my people.*" What could be more tender? What could furnish a more vivid idea of

the tender affection with which God regards His saints? He is their God—and they are His people. He theirs—they His. Wondrous union! Amazing relationship! It would be impossible for the most intellectually-gifted saint to imagine anything more calculated to comfort the sorrowing soul, or to draw out the heart to God; than to realise in any sensible measure the great and gracious truth, that God is our God, and that we are His people.

And from this source the saints of God have in all ages derived their greatest consolation. The relationship has been inconceivably dear to their hearts. They have experienced a special pleasure in looking up to God as their God, and addressing Him in that most gracious character. Speaking of them in their collective capacity, we find a much greater number of instances in which they rejoice in the circumstance of God being their God, than in any other relation in which He stands to men. In their addresses to the throne of His grace, it is made one of their great pleas for the manifestations of the divine favour—"They cry, Let us go and sacrifice to our God;" "We will serve the Lord: he is our

God ;” “ Who is a rock, save our God ?” “ Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee ;” “ For great is our God above all gods ;” “ Art not thou our God ?” “ Now, O our God, what shall we say ?” “ Now, therefore, our God, the great and mighty God ;” “ Our God turneth the curse into a blessing ;” “ He hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise to our God ;” “ This God is our God for ever and ever, and will be our guide even unto death ;” “ And God, even our God, shall bless us ;” “ He that is our God, is the God of salvation ;” “ Who is so great a God as our God ?” “ He is our God ;” “ Our God is in the heavens ;” “ Our God is merciful ;” “ Lo, this is our God ; we have waited for him ;” “ And to our God, for he will abundantly pardon ;” “ Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us ;” “ Ye are sanctified by the Spirit of our God.”

These are some of the many instances in which the people of God are represented in His Word as rejoicing in, and addressing Him as their God. The individual cases of a similar kind are also numerous—“ Jacob said, Then shall the Lord be my God ;” “ He is my God, my father's God, I will exalt him ;” “ O Lord, my God, in thee

did I put my trust ;” “I cried to my God, he heard, and answered ;” “By my God, I have leaped over a wall ;” “For God, even my God, will be with thee ;” “Think upon me, my God, for good ;” “He shall cry, Thou art my Father, and my God ;” “Thou art my God, and I will praise thee ;” “My soul shall be joyful in my God ;” “My God hath sent an angel, and hath shut the mouths of lions ;” “I will wait, for my God will hear me ;” “I thank my God, through Jesus Christ, for you all ;” “My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, in Christ Jesus.”

Here, again, it is impossible not to be struck with the great variety and magnitude of the blessings which, in the passages which have been quoted, are connected with the relationship in which the saints are represented as rejoicing,—even that of God being their God. And nothing, surely, can be plainer than this, that if the saints, whose experience is recorded in the Old and New Testaments, thus rested and rejoiced in Jehovah because He was their God, all the saints of the present day ought no less to do the same ; for as God is immutable, He is to His people now, what

He was to His people of old. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

But we have, in this respect, a yet higher and holier example set before us for our imitation. We have the example of our Lord himself. Jesus, as man, delighted to look up to the First Person of the glorious Trinity as His God. In the passage already quoted, He said to Mary, "Go tell the brethren, that I ascend to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God." In the hour, too, of His intensest agony on the cross, the language which He addressed to His Father was, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" So that, in the most urgent moment of our Saviour's life—that moment when the sufferings of His body, and the anguish of His soul, had reached their culminating point,—at that great crisis in the earthly experience of Jesus, the most endearing language in which, when, in deep darkness of soul, and when overwhelmed with sorrow, He, as man, addressed His Father, was that of—"My God." And let not the circumstance pass unobserved, that, in these, the last words He uttered on earth, and when He fancied Himself to be forsaken by His Father,

He repeats the expression—with an emphasis of which we can form no conception—“ My God, my God !” Such were the words which, on that awful occasion, fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus.

And if the Redeemer, in His capacity of man, delighted to regard the Father in the aspect of His God, there can be no need to repeat, what has been already said, that that relationship ought to be no less dear to His disciples. It was only as man, as possessed of our nature, as bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, that Jesus needed solace and support during the period of His sojourn on earth ; and, therefore, that which comforted and strengthened Him, ought to be the great fountain to which His faithful followers should resort for the comfort and the strength which they so much need in their journey through life.

There is yet one other consideration — and though last, it is far from being the least—why the saints of God ought to rejoice, and be exceeding glad in contemplating Him as their God. And that consideration is, that they will so regard Him in heaven, and shall find in the vivid view which they shall then have of Him in

that character, one of the chief springs of their inconceivable bliss. In that new song which the redeemed shall unceasingly sing in the realms of glory, the words "Our God" shall have a prominent and perpetual place. "And they sang a new song," says John in his apocalyptic perception of the exercises and enjoyments of the heavenly state, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests." And in that other song of the ransomed throng in glory, of which we read in the seventh chapter and ninth verse of the book of Revelation, we find that the same words, "Our God," occupy a no less prominent place—"And after this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

It is eminently worthy of remark, in that most glorious portion of divine truth, that the song which will thus be sung through all eternity in heaven, is not one which will gush forth from the hearts, and be uttered by the lips, of merely a majority of the redeemed; its melody will fill every heart, and its words be sung by every voice in that vast assembly. There will not be even *one* silent saint in that mighty multitude of Christ's ransomed people. So that the fact of God being their God, will be the source of ineffable and unfailing bliss to all the glorified saints in heaven.

But what of those more exalted intelligences that will be through all eternity the companions of the redeemed from among men? What of the angelic hosts? Will they, who are to be the sharers of heaven's happiness, in conjunction with the spirits of the just made perfect, as long as the wheels of eternity shall continue to revolve in their unfaltering course, be mute and inactive while the songs we have given are being sung by those who were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? Oh, no! Their seraphic voices will be heard mingling in melodious strains with

the voices of the glorified saints; and if there can be any rivalry between the two classes of those who serve and worship God in the regions above, it will be as to which of them shall sing the heartiest and the loudest notes in their hymns of praise to God and the Lamb. "And all the *angels* stood about the throne, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto *our God* for ever and ever. Amen."

If the angels cannot contemplate God as their God in the same sense as we can, namely, as being redeemed through His infinite love and mercy in Christ, yet they can and do rejoice in Him as their God, inasmuch as they owe their being, their preservation from apostasy, and their perfect bliss, to His abounding goodness; and therefore they will, through all eternity, sing those songs, in conjunction with ransomed men, in which God is regarded as their God. There will, consequently—how inexpressibly sweet the thought!—be no single being in heaven, whether partaking of the human or

angelic nature, that will not join his voice with the rest in those ascriptions of praise and glory to God and the Lamb, which will unceasingly fill every portion of heaven with their swelling and exquisite melody. And surely that which will be the source of happiness in heaven, ought to be an unfailing and overflowing spring of bliss to the saints on earth. If the redeemed from all kindreds and nations here below, and the angels who needed no redeeming mercy, because they never sinned, but kept their first estate, shall all, with one heart and one voice, for ever glory in God as *their* God, surely we, who are in our militant state, ought no less to rejoice and be happy in the consciousness of the fact, that this God is *our* God for ever and ever, and will be our guide even unto death.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATHERLY CHARACTER OF GOD CONSIDERED AS A PROOF OF HIS LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

IN our last chapter, we have sought to furnish to the saints of God some unfoldings of the fond and fervent affection which He feels towards them, as these are to be found in the fact of His being their God and they His people. But as it is a matter of such unspeakable importance to the saints, both as it relates to the Divine glory and their own comfort, that their minds should be thoroughly grounded in the great truth, that God loves them in time as He did in eternity, the assurance of that blessed fact cannot be made too clear to them. Let us glance, then, at some of the relations which God is represented in His Word as sustaining to His people, and which are eminently adapted to assure their hearts of the tender affection which He cherishes towards

them in time, as He cherished towards them in eternity.

First of all, then, there is that most endearing and most tender of relations, the relation of *Father*. God is, in a sense, the Father of all men. He is called the Father of the spirits of all flesh. He is our Maker—the great Creator of every living thing. We all owe our breath and being to Him. In that respect, therefore, He is the universal Parent—the Father of us all. But He is the Father of His people in a peculiar sense. He is so by their regeneration and adoption; and regarded parentally in that light, there is a blessedness in the relationship which no mind can conceive, and which neither the tongues of angels nor of glorified saints will ever be able fully to express. Everywhere in the Scriptures God is, in this sense, spoken of as the Father of His people.

It will not be necessary to quote many passages from the Word of God to confirm or illustrate the statement. Every attentive reader of his Bible—and every saint is presumed to be so—will be able at once to recall to his remembrance many portions of the inspired volume in which

God is represented as sustaining the relationship of Father to His people. There is no name more dear among men than that of "father." It is a word in which there is an inexhaustible amount of meaning. We know what depths of affection there are in a father's heart towards his children. We know that it is as natural for him to love them, as it is for the sun to shine. And that love leads him to bear with their waywardness, to exercise patience amidst the greatest provocations they can give him, to provide for their various wants, to protect them in times of danger, to pity them in their distress, to sustain them in their hours of weakness, to solace them in their seasons of sorrow, to delight in their society, and to forgive their faults when they have done amiss. And if all this be true of the better class of earthly fathers, how much more is it of God in the fatherly relation which He sustains to His people! Who shall set forth the love, the pity, the compassion that there are in the heart of God towards His saints? These attributes of His character are all infinite like Himself; yet though they cannot be comprehended, we are enabled to form some conception of what is included in

the term Father, as applied to God, when we think of the glory which attaches to the relationship which is indicated in the words, "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord." Here the great Jehovah actually, in a sense, elevates us poor worms of the dust, and rebels against His government, to the dignity which belongs to Himself. No wonder that the Apostle John, when he contemplated that glorious and gracious relationship, broke out in the rapturous exclamation, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"

But though the term Father is to all the children of God, or at least ought to be, inexpressibly blessed in itself, because of the unfathomable depths it discloses of the love, the tenderness, the pity, and the condescension of God towards us, it is found to possess a peculiar import and special sweetness, in the frequency with which it was employed by Christ, when sojourning as man on earth. If we may so speak, it was, as will be made to appear more fully hereafter, the favourite word which

Jesus used in His approaches in prayer to Him who sent Him to the world to rescue our race from otherwise hopeless ruin. Indeed, in addressing God, Christ hardly ever, as will afterwards be shewn more at length, employed any other term than that of Father. And when speaking to His disciples respecting the Supreme Being, He almost invariably made use of the words, "Your Father," "Your heavenly Father," "Your Father in heaven." So, too, when identifying Himself, so far as related to His human nature, with His disciples, His most frequent phraseology was, "My Father, and your Father." And on that memorable and deeply touching occasion, when, in answer to their solicitations that He would teach them how to pray, the language which he instructed them to employ in approaching the throne of God was, "Our Father which art in heaven." And no other aspect of the Divine character is presented to us in that beautiful form of prayer, to which I shall afterwards have occasion to refer.

In this, as in all other respects, Christ has left us an example for our imitation. If He constantly regarded God in the endearing rela-

tion of Father, and taught us to do so likewise, we surely ought to be obedient to His will. If the people of God could but bring themselves habitually to look on Him in the paternal light in which our Redeemer, in His capacity as man, uniformly did, all that slavish dread which the most eminent saints occasionally feel, would vanish from our minds, and we should joy and rejoice in God. Our hearts would then be drawn out to Him in abounding filial affection. There would be a child-like simplicity in our confidence in God. And ever discerning in Him all that tenderness, love, and pity which flow in a father's bosom, we should lie passive in His hands, amidst all the chequered scenes of life, feeling that One whose affection for us is so strong, and whose relationship is so sacred, can never Himself do, or permit to be done by unfriendly agencies, anything that is not for our real good. Let us, then, seek for grace ever to regard God as our Father; and for the illumination of the Holy Spirit to discern, in some measure, the fulness of meaning there is in the word as applied to God. And then, habitually approaching the throne of grace, and crying, "Abba, Father,"

we will feel ourselves unspeakably happy in a sense of His love, and in the outgoings of our affection towards Him.

The instances in which God speaks of Himself, in His holy Word, as sustaining the endearing relation of Father to His saints, are so very numerous, that all that can be expected of us to do, will be to quote a few of them, accompanied with a passing observation, as circumstances may suggest. Allusion has already been made to the tenderness of an earthly father's affection for his children. The Psalmist, taking up that fact as conveying a better idea of sincere and ardent love than could otherwise be furnished, says of God, that, "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." The term "pitieth," as here employed, is one of great expressiveness. It includes the most tender affection as well as compassion. It unfolds most blessedly the overflowings of God's love towards His people. In the thirty-first chapter and ninth verse of the book of Jeremiah, we have direct from God's own lips, in His communications with His people, a very delightful unfolding of the Fatherly relation which He bears to them—

“Behold,” says Jehovah himself, “I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.” No one can fail to be struck with the way in which this beautiful and precious portion of Scripture winds up. In the verses just quoted, as well as in those which precede them, various spiritual blessings of inestimable value to the saint of God, and shewing us, as it were, the greatness of the love which He bears to us, are specified in a manner the most marked; and then the passage concludes by clearly indicating the close connexion which subsists between the bestowment of those blessings, and the fatherly relation which God sustains to His people: “For,” says He, “I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.” The same endearing words are equally applicable to the

spiritual Israel and Ephraim of the present day, and will be so, so long as the world shall last. We have another proof of the tenderness of God's regards to His people, given by Himself, in a reference which He makes to this blessed relationship in the first chapter and sixth verse of the book of Malachi—"A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" He here remonstrates with, and rebukes His people for their forgetfulness of Him, and for their rebelliousness against Him; and, in doing so, makes the fact of His sustaining the relationship of Father to them, the greatest aggravation that could be given to their guilt. "If," He says, in reproachful terms, "I be a father, where is mine honour?" God feels in reference to this in the same way as His creatures do on earth,—that nothing can be more unnatural, nothing more unseemly, nothing more criminal, than that His children should withhold from Him that affection, honour, and homage, which are so eminently His

due, in virtue of the fatherly relation which He bears to them. Because He is our Father, and feels for us with all the tenderness of an affectionate parent, He claims, in return, that we should love, honour, and obey Him.

See, also, in the passage which has last been quoted, the wondrous condescension of God in thus stooping to reason and remonstrate with His creatures, because they did not render to Him that reverential regard which one sustaining to them so endearing a relation as that of their Father had a right to require and expect at their hands. It might be supposed that such mingled condescension and love would melt the hardest heart, and bring back, with weeping and with confessions of the deepest regret, those that have wandered from God, or in any way failed to remember Him with the warmest affection, the most profound gratitude, and the loftiest adoration. And yet, alas! it is as true of God's spiritual Israel now, as it was of His people in the days of Malachi, that they do not render to Him the honour which is due from children to their Father in heaven. And this chiefly arises from the dimness of our perceptions of the

fatherly relation in which He stands to us. Did the saints of God but realise vividly and habitually that glorious and gracious relationship, their hearts would not be harassed with those slavish views of Him which, in so many cases, cause them to walk in darkness and in dread, and which indicate how nearly they have been driven to the verge of despair.

Let us now meditate for a moment on that solemn and impressive representation which God gives of His tender love towards His people, as unfolded in His fatherly character, which we find in the first chapter and second verse of the book of Isaiah. Perhaps there is not a passage of more awful sublimity in the whole Word of God than the passage in question. Through the mouth of His prophet God calls heaven and earth to witness the frightful aggravation of His people's guilt, in consequence of the parental relation which He bore to them, the unceasing solicitude which He felt for their welfare, and the tender affection with which He regarded them,—“Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled

against me.” “Nourished and brought up children.” Wondrous words to come direct from the lips of God himself! God, as our Father, *nourishing* us as a mother nourishes the child in whom her soul’s most tender affections are centred! What unutterable love on the part of God is revealed in that precious portion of His Word! And how great must be the depths of that depravity which there is in man, when he could rebel against a Being so good and so gracious!

But let us come to the developments of the fatherly character of God which are made to us in the New Testament. Though in the Old Testament, as we have seen, we are furnished with numerous perceptions of the paternal relationship which God sustains to His saints, these are but faint and feeble unfoldings of Jehovah as our Father, compared with the effulgent light which is shed around the subject in that brighter and better dispensation under which it is our lot to live. With the exception of those of whom we read in the books of the law, of the Psalms, and of the prophets, who were privileged to have especially enlightened views of

God, even His own peculiar people had but very indistinct ideas of His fatherly character. They saw Him in His parental relations to them as but through a glass darkly. And, as a necessary consequence, there was much of gloom, of fear, and of bondage in all their conceptions of Him. They regarded Him more in the light of an offended Ruler than of a loving Father. There was so much of dread in their worship of Jehovah, that their devotional exercises, instead of being felt to be the performance of a delightful duty, were looked on in the light of an irksome, though necessary task. Theirs was, in a great measure, a worship of terror. Even Moses himself, on a memorable occasion, when holding direct communication with God, said, "I exceedingly fear and quake."

But how marked and how blessed the contrast now! Under the ministration of the Spirit—that ministration which is said to be much more glorious—the case is just the reverse. If we have but correct conceptions of what God is as our God and Father in Christ—and all God's people in the present day ought to have accurate views of the paternal character

of Jehovah—we shall come into His presence, whether in the sanctuary, at the family altar, or in the seclusion of the closet when the saint is alone with God, with all the holy familiarity of dear children. We shall draw nigh to Him in the spirit of that liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free, and know nothing whatever of that spirit of bondage of which so many, in the present day, for want of right perceptions of God's parental character, are the subjects. This is the unspeakable privilege, the inexpressible mercy of all the saints of God who live under the dispensation of the glorious gospel. It is that gospel alone which fully unfolds the fatherly character of Jehovah, and enables His people to realise the great and most marvellous fact, that they are His dear children,—sons and daughters, whom He loves with such an affection, as none but a father can feel.

It is of the utmost importance, on all accounts, that the saints of God should endeavour habitually to realise this view of His character. We have already brought before them some of the illustrations of the blessed truth, that are to be found in the inspired records of that dispensation

which preceded the advent of Christ into the world, and which has been superseded by the more glorious dispensation which He came to establish. Let us now, therefore, advert to a few of the more striking proofs of the same unspeakably precious truth with which the New Testament, from its commencement to its close, abounds. We can but quote some of the many passages illustrative of God's love to His people, as these are furnished by the developments of His fatherly character which are brought before us in the writings of the evangelists and the apostles.

Every attentive reader of the New Testament must have been struck with the frequency and marked emphasis with which the inspired penmen of that portion of Holy Scripture use the word "Father," as applied to God. It is a term which God takes to Himself. It is blessed beyond all thought to find the inspired writers speaking of God as the Father of His people; but it is doubly delightful to hear God himself employing the word. "I will," He says, in the sixth chapter and eighteenth verse of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians,—“I will be a Father

unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." "But," says Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, "ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." In the Galatians he expresses himself in almost the very same terms—"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." From this it is clear, that the earliest Christians had a distinct perception and a comprehensive view of the great blessing involved in the filial relation in which they stood to God. And it is no less manifest, that they did what all God's people now ought to do,—habitually draw near to God in the filial spirit, and with all the simple and implicit confidence of children in their parents. In various other parts of his epistles Paul makes use of the expression, "*the* Father," thereby shewing how he delighted in regarding God in that endearing character. "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him;" "Paul, an apostle, by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, Grace be to you," [the Galatians] "and peace, from God the Father;" "By Him we have access by one

Spirit to the Father ;” “ Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ;” “ Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ ;” “ Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father ;” “ It pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell ;” “ Unto the Church which is in God the Father ;” “ What son is he whom the father chasteneth not ?” The other apostles also frequently employ the same language. “ Pure and undefiled religion,” says James, “ before God and the Father,” &c. ; “ Therewith bless we God, even the Father.” And Peter says, “ To the foreknowledge of God the Father,” &c. ; “ If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass ye the time of your sojourning here in fear ;” “ He received from God the Father honour and glory ;” “ We shew unto you,” says John, “ that eternal life which was with the Father ;” “ Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ ;” “ We have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous ;” “ I write to you, because ye have known the Father ;” “ If

any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him ;” “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God !” “Mercy and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ ;” “As we received a commandment from the Father ;” “He that abideth in Christ hath the Father ;” “To them that are sanctified by God the Father.”

These are some examples of the frequency and force with which the New Testament writers employ the phrase, “the Father.” It is not necessary to add to the number of instances in which God is spoken of by the apostles as the Father of His people. Rather let me now transfer to these pages some of the many cases in which the inspired writers speak of God in His paternal character, in terms of appropriation to themselves and to all believers. The first occasion in the Old Testament in which the phrase, “*our* Father,” occurs as applied to God, is in the twenty-ninth chapter and tenth verse of the first book of Chronicles—in that beautiful prayer of David, beginning with “Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, our Father, for ever.” And in the sixty-

third chapter and sixteenth verse of Isaiah, God's people are represented as addressing Him in these words,—“Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.” In the succeeding chapter and the eighth verse, God's people are described as again addressing Him in His parental character,—“But now, O Lord, thou art our Father: we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.”

But it is in the New Testament that the paternal character of God is most fully unfolded by the words, “*our* Father,” just as it has been shewn to be in the use of the phrase, “*the* Father.” Most sweetly is God's fatherly character brought out in the Epistles. Every one must have remarked the frequency with which Paul both begins and ends his epistles by references to God as the Father of His people. To the Romans, in the first chapter and seventh verse, he wishes the enjoyment of “grace and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” And so in the first chapter and third verse of the First

Epistle to the Corinthians,—“ Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” In the first chapter and second verse of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul employs the same words,—“ Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” In the first chapter and second verse of Ephesians, precisely the same language is again employed by Paul,—“ Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” The same phraseology is also used in the first chapter and second verse of Philippians,—“ Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” I quote the words in full in each of these passages, to shew what vast importance the Apostle Paul attached to the view of God’s fatherly character, which he thus so prominently brings out. Exactly the same salutation is given to the Colossians, in the first chapter and second verse,—“ To the saints and faithful brethren which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In the next epistle, that of the Thessalonians, the first chapter and third verse, the same apostle

again employs the phraseology of "our Father," —"Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God our Father." In the first chapter and second verse of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, we find Paul recurring to the use of the identical language which he had employed in his salutations to the saints in so many other places,—“Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Perhaps there could be no better proof of the inestimable preciousness to Paul, of the paternal relationship which God bears to His people, than is to be found in the fact, that the language which has just been quoted follows immediately after the use of the phrase “our Father” in the first verse. In that verse the apostle says, “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” If the fatherly character of God had not been inconceivably dear to him, he would not thus have given that character such marked prominence in his writings. Very similar is the language he addresses to individual believers as well as

churches. He begins his First Epistle to Timothy with the salutation of "Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith, Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." And so in his letter to Philemon. In the third verse, after having spoken of him as "Philemon, our dearly beloved," he wishes him "Grace and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Various other passages occur in Paul's writings, in which the expression "our Father," as applied to God, occupies a prominent place,— "Unto God our Father be glory;" "In the sight of God and our Father;" "Our God and Father direct our way unto you;" "That he may establish you in holiness before God our Father;" "Now God, even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work." In this latter passage, the tenderness of God's love to His people, which we are endeavouring to bring forcibly before their minds, is associated in a very marked manner with the fatherly relation which He sustains to them. There is a remarkable significance altogether in the verse. Just pause for

a moment to ponder this precious portion of divine truth. The love of God to His saints is clearly brought out ; but that is not all. It is His love as a Father. It is the Father, *our* Father, who hath loved us. And one happy result of this parental affection on the part of God is, that it hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope ; unceasing consolation for the present, amid all our sufferings and sorrows ; and hope, a “good hope,” for the future. In the latter clause of the verse, God is Himself again represented as the direct source or author of our comfort, in virtue of His fatherly relation, the repetition giving great additional force to the gracious representation. Nor is this all. To shew the exalted views which the apostle had of the fatherly character of God, he uses the most expressive and emphatic language which it was possible for pen to employ, to set before us the preciousness of the paternal relation which God sustains towards us. It is not simply “God our Father,” but “God, *even* our Father,”—as if he had been lost in amazement and adoration at the condescension and love of God in vouchsafing to speak of ruined rebels, sunk in the lowest depths of degradation, as be-

ing His children. "God, *even* our Father." Meditate, Christian reader, on the consoling words, and the deeper you dive into their meaning, the more you will be lost in wonder, love, and admiration at the boundless bliss involved in them.

But we now come to the consideration of another development of the great love wherewith God loves His people in time, as furnished in the fatherly relation in which He is revealed as standing to them. I allude to that unfolding of God's parental character which our Lord gave to us when He sojourned on earth. Whatever view Jesus delighted to take of the character of God, ought to be also especially dear to us as His disciples and His professed followers in all things. It should never be forgotten, that Christ, when in our world, in all His intercourse with God, and in speaking of God to His disciples or to the Jews, invariably spoke in His capacity as man. And yet, though this great and most momentous truth ought never to be lost sight of, there is too much reason to fear that it often is. There is a tendency in the minds of the best of Christians to regard the Lord Jesus in the deity of His person, instead of purely in its humanity. We

lose, by this means, an incalculable amount of comfort. In a sense, we can have no sympathy with Jesus in His essential Godhead. His feelings, emotions, experiences must, in the very nature of things, be different from ours. But if we could only contrive, which may be done through grace, to keep our minds steadfastly fixed on the great fact, that Jesus, while in this world, felt, spoke, and acted—except when His power as God was put forth in the working of miracles, to attest the reality of His mission from heaven—in His capacity as man, as bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and as subject to all our infirmities, sin excepted,—then would we derive an inexhaustible store of comfort from the words which He addressed to God, and the language which He employed in speaking of Him.

Keeping this consideration in view, let us look at the aspect in which He especially delighted to regard God. That aspect, we have said before, was the paternal relation which God bore alike to Jesus as man, and to His followers. It has been already observed, that Christ seldom made use of any other word except “Father” in reference to God. As the whole of the Redeemer’s

life, as recorded in the Evangelists, furnishes illustrations of this, it will only be necessary to glance at a few of the passages in which He speaks of God in the relation of Father.

First, we have Jesus speaking of God as *the* Father,—the Father of Himself and of His disciples:—“No man knoweth the Son, but the Father;” “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;” “The glory as of the only begotten of the Father;” “The Son who is in the bosom of the Father;” “The Father loveth the Son;” “Shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth;” “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son;” “He that honours not the Son, honours not the Father;” “I seek not mine own will, but the will of my Father;” “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;” “No man can come to me except the Father draw him;” “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; and no man cometh unto the Father but by me;” “I am in the Father, and the Father in me;” “I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, so do I;” “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you;” “I came forth from the Father, and go to the Father.”

These are some of the instances in which Jesus speaks of God as *the* "Father." Let us now look at a few passages in the Evangelists, in which Christ only speaks of God as "the Father" of all who believe,—as the Father of His disciples, so very dear to Him. And here the mind of every reader will at once fix itself on the recognition which Jesus wished His disciples to make of the fatherly character of God, which is specified and illustrated, as before remarked, in our Lord's prayer. That beautiful and simple manual of devotion begins by addressing God as Father,—*"Our Father which art in heaven."* So that Christ specially taught His disciples to approach God in their devotional exercises, whether of a private or of a public kind, in the character of their Father; shewing conclusively that He regarded that as the most endearing relation which God could sustain to His people. *"Our Father."* Holy and blessed word! How it ought to fill the heart with filial feelings towards God! And with what a sacred familiarity ought His people ever to come into His presence! They approach Him as affectionate children, because they realise, in some measure, however imperfect, the tenderness

towards them that there is in His heart, as their "Father which art in heaven." As there is no relation which God sustains towards His saints so tender or so ennobling as that of their Father, so there is no privilege which they can enjoy on this side the glorious heaven to which they are going, so great as that of the free access which they have at all times, in virtue of this relationship, to the throne of grace. A loving and dutiful child is ever welcome into the presence of its parent. An affectionate earthly father delights in the society of his child, and to listen to the lisping of its little wants, if in infancy; or to hear the more distinct expression of its wishes, if somewhat advanced in years. And so "our Father" in heaven displays the tenderness of His affection for us His sons and daughters, by the special pleasure which He takes in our approaches to His presence, in order that we may spread all our wants before Him, and ask those blessings which our necessities require.

But it is not in the Lord's prayer only that Jesus sought to impress on His disciples the fatherly character of God. Just before He taught them that prayer, He warned them not to make

long prayers like the Pharisees, “for,” said He, “your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask him.” And immediately after He had given that comprehensive and eminently devotional form of address to God, He adds, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you : but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.” A few verses further on, in the same chapter, we find Jesus again employing the same phraseology,—“Behold,” says He, in the sixth chapter and twenty-sixth verse of the Gospel according to Matthew, “the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.” And then, again, in the thirty-second verse of the same chapter, we find Him once more repeating the words,—“For your heavenly Father,” He saith, “knoweth that ye have need of these things.”

That it was not on the occasion only of His instructing His disciples how to pray, that Jesus first revealed, by His direct teaching, the fatherly character of God, and sought to impress on their minds the importance of endeavouring to realise

their filial relationship to Him,—is also shewn in the preceding chapter. In the early part of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ directed the minds of His disciples to the fatherly character which the Divine Being sustained to them ; and that character He kept before them unto the end,—“Let your light,” He says, in that memorable discourse, “so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven ;” “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven ;” “Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect ;” “Otherwise ye have no reward of your Father in heaven ;” “Thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” Elsewhere Jesus said to His disciples, “Not one sparrow shall fall to the ground without your Father ;” “Even so it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish ;” “Call no one Father upon the earth, for one is your Father who is in heaven ;” “Be ye merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful ;” “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom ;” “I ascend to my Father, and your Father ; to my God, and your God.”

But not only did the Saviour thus didactically instruct His disciples in the great and blessed duty of dwelling pre-eminently on the fatherly character of God; He brought out that gracious and glorious relationship in a manner the most vivid and wonderful, in the parable of the prodigal son. That singularly beautiful parable—one which no one who has a heart to feel, even where real religion is absent, can read without being profoundly touched—furnishes us with such a view of the overflowing affection there is in the heart of God, in connexion with His fatherly character, as is quite overpowering. Like the young prodigal, we all have forsaken, in the person of our first parents, and daily by our actual sins, our Father's house, and have lost every feeling of love and loyalty to Him. And yet, when we are but led to see our folly and our guilt, and are anxious to return to our Father's house, He not only gives us a cordial welcome, but receives us to His arms and His heart, as well as to His home. He does more. He sees us afar off—signifying the intense solicitude with which, even in our rebellious state, He never ceases to regard us, and which leads Him to long and look for our return.

And the moment He espies us on our way back to Him, instead of waiting until we have returned, He goes out to meet us. And not only goes, but goes with all practicable haste. He does not content Himself with walking, or even walking at a quick pace, but He *runs*. Mark that precious word. God is actually described as *running* to meet the returning rebel—the son who had so grossly abused all His affection and kindness, and forgotten Him altogether. And when the offending son and the forgiving Father thus meet, instead of God waiting until the prodigal has fallen on his knees before Him, and expressed his profound penitence for the profligate course he had pursued, He actually falls on his neck and kisses him. What an astonishing view does our Saviour here give us of the love, the compassion, the condescension of God, in the fatherly character He sustains to His people! The more we try to grasp the greatness of the love, compassion, and condescension of our Father in heaven, as unfolded in this most affecting and beautiful parable, the more do we feel our utter incapacity to comprehend the amazing fact. The only wonder is that *any* heart can hold out against

such astonishing love on the part of God. If there be any backslider who, in God's providence, has been led to read these lines, let me say to such—"Can you resist any longer such transcendent tenderness and condescension? Will you not rather say, 'I will arise, and go to my Father?'"

Let us repeat, that, from all this, there is a great practical lesson to be learned. If Jesus did thus so frequently and emphatically impress on the minds of His followers in the days of His flesh, that they ought habitually and affectionately to look up to God as their Father, it surely behoves all believers to act in accordance with the wishes of their Lord and Master. Just in proportion as they do realise a sense of God's fatherly feelings towards them, will they love and delight in Him, and see the exquisite tenderness of the love which He bears to them. But on this point it will be right to make some special remarks towards the close of our meditations on the fatherly character of God.

But not only did Jesus thus pre-eminently delight to dwell on the fatherly character of God in reference to His disciples; He no less

delighted to regard God as sustaining that endearing relation to Himself. "Father," "Holy Father," "Heavenly Father," "Righteous Father," "My Father," were the words He almost invariably employed in His prayers to God. Just take a few instances,—“What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour;” “Father, glorify thy name;” “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee;” “O Father, glorify thou me with thyself;” “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me;” “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee;” “The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father;” “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight;” “Whosoever confesseth me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven; and whosoever denieth me before men, him will I also deny before my Father in heaven;” “All things are delivered to me of my Father;” “My Father,

who is in heaven ;” “The angels behold the face of my Father ;” “It shall be done of my Father, who is in heaven ;” “So shall my heavenly Father do unto you ;” “Think you not that I cannot pray unto my Father, and he will send me twelve legions of angels ?” “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business ?”

But passing over a great many other instances in which Christ thus spoke of or addressed God as His Father, let us notice the interesting fact, that in each of the more momentous scenes which characterised the closing period of His earthly existence, it was of God in His fatherly character that He spoke, and to Him in that character that He addressed His prayers. When instituting the ordinance of the Supper, which was to perpetuate the remembrance of His death, He said to His disciples, “I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” In that sad and solemn scene which took place in the Garden of Gethsemane, just immediately before His crucifixion, and when the accumulation of His sufferings had become so great that His humanity seemed, for the moment, as if it would give way beneath the

awful load, the prayer which He addressed to God was, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." "He went away again, a second time," as we are told by Matthew, repeating nearly the same words, and still addressing God as His Father,—“O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.” Even a third time, the same evangelist tells us, He left His disciples and poured out His soul unto God, “saying the same words.”

On the cross, as in the Garden of Gethsemane, we also find our Lord rejoicing in the fatherly character of God. On that ignominious tree, and amidst agonies so excruciating, that we can form no adequate conception of their intensity, He offered up two prayers to God. The one was on behalf of those who had put Him to death. For them His prayer was, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” The other prayer related to Himself. It was not only His last address to God, but it consisted of the last words He uttered before He expired. And in that prayer the fatherly cha-

acter of God was still uppermost in His mind,—
 “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit :
 and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” So
 that our Lord died as He had lived, with thoughts
 of God, in the fatherly relation He bore to Him,
 filling His mind.

Nor was this all. After His resurrection,
 when He appeared to His disciples, and spoke
 to them of God, it was still in the character
 of Father. When Mary, in the overflowings of
 her affection and joy at the sight of her risen
 Lord, would have embraced Him, he said to her,
 “Touch me not ; for I am not yet ascended to my
 Father, and your Father ; to my God, and your
 God.” And in the last words He addressed to
 those of His disciples whom He found assembled
 in His name, in an upper room in Jerusalem, He
 still shewed that the fatherly character of God
 was that in which He especially delighted,—
 “And, behold,” He said, “I send the promise of
 my Father upon you : but tarry ye in the city
 of Jerusalem, until ye be endued from on high.”
 And, too, in His memorable and gracious com-
 mission to His apostles, the same view of the
 paternal character of God was uppermost in His

mind,—“Go ye therefore,” He said to them, as recorded in Luke’s Gospel, “and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

Nor did the fatherly relationship of God, on which Jesus so eminently delighted to dwell when on earth, lose its loveliness or its interest when He left our world to return to those abodes of bliss and of glory, from which He had absented Himself for a season. He carried into heaven the same views of God’s parental character which He cherished with so much fondness and affection when on earth. Of that unspeakably precious truth every redeemed soul will have a most blessed proof the moment it has passed the portals of the eternal world. Amid the gladdening sounds which will greet the ears of ransomed sinners whom Jesus welcomes to glory and to Himself, not the least joyous will be the words, “Come, ye blessed of my *Father*, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

So that at the last as at the first—no less in eternity than in time—no less in heaven than when on earth, the paternal character of God will be, as it always was, especially dear to the

heart of Jesus. And it cannot surely be necessary to repeat that which has already been so emphatically remarked—that as He was in all points to be an example to us, it is alike our duty and our privilege to endeavour to imitate the pattern, in everything practicable, which He has put before us. Christians ought never, as was mentioned in a previous part of this chapter, to lose sight of the great fact that, during the period of the Saviour's sojourn on earth, He was in *all* respects, sin excepted, like unto us. When He prayed, just as when He suffered, He did so as man. As God, He never prayed. As God, He had no need of prayer; and, consequently, could not pray at all. To have prayed as God, would have been to pray to Himself, because He was God. It was purely in His human nature, it was solely in His character as man, that He felt, spoke, and acted during the period of His public ministry; and, therefore, the views on which He especially delighted to dwell in His contemplations of God, and in all His intercourse with Him, are, as before observed, those which ought to be especially sweet to our souls, and dear to our hearts. Just as God was His Father in

relation to His humanity, so is God the Father of all who are the members of His mystical body. We have Christ's own direct assurance that we are His brethren, and that He regards us as such. When on that memorable occasion on which He was told that His mother and his brethren—His natural brothers—stood without desiring to speak to Him, His answer was, stretching out His hand to His disciples, “Behold my mother and *my brethren.*” And in that other deeply interesting passage in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, in which He so touchingly and so forcibly sets forth the profound sympathy He feels for His disciples, and how His honour and happiness are bound up in theirs, He says to those who had ministered to the poor and the miserable among His followers, and who were about to be eternally ushered into the abodes of bliss, “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these *my brethren*, ye have done it unto me.” And so in a few verses afterwards, when He is about to consign His enemies to the abodes of utter darkness and eternal despair, He makes their neglect of the poor and the wretched of His disciples the ground of their

condemnation,—“ Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these ” —alluding to the same word *brethren* which He had used before—“ ye did it not to me.” When, too, our adorable Lord met with His disciples after His resurrection, and when on His way to Galilee, he said to them,—“ Go, tell my *brethren* that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.” Again,—“ For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee ;” “ For verily he took not on him the nature of angels ; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.” Jesus thus is our Brother—our elder Brother—
“ THE BROTHER BORN FOR ADVERSITY.”

Seeing, then, that God is so clearly set before us by the Lord Jesus Christ as our Father, even as He is His Father, and that Christ regards us as brethren — children of the same celestial Parent as Himself, so far as relates to His human nature — let us seek much more than

ever we have hitherto done, to realise in all its preciousness and power, the great truth that God does sustain a parental character to all His people. And if we do but realise this relationship, we shall have a clearer and more blessed perception of the incomprehensible tenderness that there is in God's heart towards us, than ever it has hitherto been our mercy to attain to.

But it remains to produce yet another proof of the paternal relation which God sustains to His saints. That is furnished in those parts of His Word in which we are spoken of as His sons and daughters—as children, and as heirs of God. To the Apostle Paul, the idea of sonship, in relation to God, seemed to be the source of special delight,—“That we might,” he says, in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, “receive the adoption of sons.” And then he adds, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son ; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” “For it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their sal-

vation perfect through sufferings." Not less blessedly is this relationship brought out by the same apostle in the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, from the fifth to the ninth verse,—“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” Going backwards to the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans—that wondrous and precious epitome of gospel truth, and in which the loving heart of a loving God is so fully and so felicitously laid bare to believers—we find the apostle gives us some most gracious glimpses of the great love wherewith God hath loved us, as grounded on

the fatherly relation which He sustains towards us,—“For as many,” he tells us, “as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” And again, in the nineteenth verse, he says, “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” In the twenty-first verse the same glorious idea of the filial relation which subsists between God and His people, is revealed to us by the representation there made of our being His children,—“Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” In the second chapter and fifteenth verse of the Epistle to the Philippians, also, the apostle brings out the same relationship,—“That ye may,” he says, “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God,

without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." And what saint of God does not delight to dwell on that full and forcible unfolding of the fatherly character of God with which we are furnished by the beloved disciple in the third chapter and the first and second verses of his first Epistle? He is lost in wonder, love, and praise, at the thought of a relationship so high and holy, and of a privilege so great,—“Behold,” he says, “what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” In the tenth verse, the Apostle John recurs to the same relationship under the term children,—“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.” Here let me say, by way of parenthesis—What a contrast! The children of God, and the children of the devil! All of us belong to either of the two categories. Happy they who

belong to the former. Happy they who are the children—the sons and daughters of God.

The first instance in which the word “children” is applied to God’s people, is to be found in the fourteenth chapter and first verse of the book of Deuteronomy,—“Ye are the children of the Lord your God.” It is often afterwards to be met with as employed in the same sense in the Old Testament; but it is in the New Testament that it occurs with a frequency and fulness of meaning, which delight the hearts of all God’s people,—“That ye may be the children of your Father in heaven;” “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful;” “Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God;” “Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God;” “And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were

scattered abroad ;” “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children ;” “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ ;” “By this we know that we love the children of God.”

Even yet more forcibly and sweetly, were that possible, is the fatherly relationship of God developed by the application of the term “heirs” to His people, in reference to Himself. The word heir even goes beyond that of a son or of a daughter. All sons or daughters on earth are not inheritors of their fathers’ possessions. But all God’s people are heirs of Him, in addition to being His children,—His sons or daughters. “If children,” says Paul, in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, already alluded to, “if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Probably there is not, in the whole compass of revealed truth, a more precious passage than this. The mind of the saint of God is altogether overcome, when he attempts to dive into the unfathomable depths of its meaning. We are lost in the height and breadth,—in the immeasurable comprehensiveness and glory of the theme. A rebel against God, one who would,

if he could, have subverted the throne of Jehovah, and exiled Him from His own universe—a poor worthless worm of the dust, to be made an *heir* of God, and a *joint-heir* with Christ! The thought is altogether overwhelming! The powers of the mind sink beneath the attempt to grasp the wondrous truth! Were God to give us a supplemental revelation as large and as full as that which, in the Bible, we already possess, a book even of that bulk would not convey to us more of the love and condescension of the Most High than is furnished to us in the brief passage which has been quoted,—“Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” The fulness of meaning and blessedness there are in the words, will never be adequately apprehended while eternity shall last. Even an infinite succession of eternities, if we may so speak, would be far too short to exhaust the love, the grace, the glory, which are involved in the words, “An heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ.”

I have thus sought to bring before believers in Christ such developments of the fatherly relation in which God stands to them, as will enlarge and

exalt their conceptions of the love with which He regards them in their present state of being. The inference from all that has been advanced is so obvious, that no one can mistake it. If God be our Father by regeneration and adoption, and we are His dear children, surely we ought ever to rejoice in that marvellous manifestation of His love which is bound up in the paternal relation which He bears to us. Nothing so fully unfolds the overflowing affection which glows in the bosom of God, as to see Him in His fatherly character. It unveils His very heart, and reveals, in all its intensity—at least, as far as we are capable of apprehending it—the love to us which burns within. The contemplation of the infinite tenderness with which God, as our heavenly Father, ever regards us, ought to draw out our hearts in gratitude and love towards Him. As His children, we should make known all our wants to God, cast all our cares upon Him, seek His direction in every step we take in the pathway of life, confide in Him in every emergency in which we may be placed, and approach Him hour by hour, and moment by moment, with all that holy familiarity, and all that implicit trust, which the

Spirit of adoption ought to engender in our hearts ; and which that Spirit never fails to inspire, where simple faith is in lively exercise. It gives, if we may so express ourselves, an increased loveliness to the love with which God regards His people, to know and feel that it is the affection of a *Father*—the affection of our God and *our Father* in Christ Jesus ; for His paternal character is the most blessed aspect in which we can regard the Almighty. Just as we are enabled by the Divine Spirit to realise the great truth that God is our Father in Christ, and that we are His children, in that proportion will we delight to draw near to Him in prayer and praise. We know that though our affectionate Father may occasionally frown upon us when we have done that which we knew would be displeasing to Him, yet that He never feels towards us emotions of wrath. He loves us with all the tenderness of a Father's heart, even when He visits us with chastisement. There is not a drop of Divine indignation in any of those adverse dispensations of Providence which we may have to encounter in our Christian journey. On the contrary, they are all but so many proofs of the fervent affection with which God regards us :

for it is said, in a passage already quoted,—“If we receive not chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are we bastards, and not sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?” How unutterably blessed they must be, who, never losing sight of the parental relation which God sustains towards His saints, can thus at all times, and under all circumstances, discern the heart as well as the hand of a Father in every application of the rod which they may have received! Happy they who can thus, in all the emergencies of life, steadfastly fix the eye of faith on their heavenly Parent, and say to Him, “Father, it is thy hand, as an expression of the love that is in thy heart, that lies heavily upon me; do as seemeth good in thy sight.” Seek, then, ye saints of God who may have had hard thoughts of Him, though ye know that in some measure ye love Him,—seek to obtain a clear and abiding perception of His relationship to you as your Father in Christ, and then you will have hallowed and happy thoughts of Him. Instead of meditating on Him with dread, you will contemplate Him with delight, and discern in those attributes of His character which were formerly clothed in terror to your

mind, springs of an ample and enduring joy. Try to keep ever present to the eye of faith His fatherly character, and that you are His children, His sons and daughters in whom His soul delights. And if you do this you will even here on earth have many sweet and precious foretastes of that perfect bliss in heaven which all who are ransomed by the blood of Christ, shall ever derive from the more ample developments of God's fatherly character, which will there be made the moment you have passed the pearly gates, and which will be ever growing in their blessedness as well as fulness, so long as eternity itself shall last.

CHAPTER V.

THE LOVE OF GOD AS EXHIBITED IN VARIOUS
OTHER RELATIONS WHICH HE SUSTAINS TO
HIS SAINTS.

IN our last chapter we endeavoured to bring as vividly as possible before the minds of our readers the fatherly character of God, as forcibly illustrating the great love wherewith He loves His people. But as believers cannot have too many illustrations or proofs of the tenderness that there is in God's heart towards them, it may be well to glance at a few more of the most prominent of those relations in which He stands to His saints. Let no Christian think for a moment that the subject is one about which too much may be said. That cannot be. The time is coming when we shall all need every consolation and every source of support which can be derived from the gracious exhibitions of God's character, which are made to us in His Word. None of us

have any immunity from days of darkness, from seasons of sorrow, or from times of temptation. And even if we should not be peculiarly harassed in life by the great enemy of God and His people, nor have to pass through deep waters, we may be so sorely tried and so severely tempted when we approach, or have entered, the dark valley and shadow of death, as that some of those very views of the character of God, which were not with any special power brought to our minds in life, may then become inconceivably precious to our souls.

Let us, therefore, glance for a moment at the character of *Friend*, in relation to us, which God bears in His Word. That character was first given to Abraham by God himself, who, as James tells us, was called the friend of God. And no one, it is unnecessary to say, can be the friend of God without having God for his friend. If we are His friends, He is our friend. In that solemn and sublime prayer of Jehosaphat, recorded in the twentieth chapter and from the fifth to the twelfth verses of the second book of Chronicles, God is appealed to (ver. 7) as the friend of Abraham, —“Art not thou our God, who didst drive out

the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?"

But it is not only that the prophets and inspired writers of the Old Testament represented God, speaking in their own persons, as the friend of Abraham. In the forty-first chapter and the eighth verse of the book of Isaiah, God himself, with His own mouth, condescends to speak of Abraham as His friend,—“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.” Though the word only occurs in connexion with Abraham, yet all God's people are as much the friends of God—the objects of God's friendship—as Abraham was. He sustained a representative character. He was the father of the faithful. And hence all true believers are spoken of as the spiritual children of Abraham. What, therefore, is true of the representative, is no less true of the represented. What was true of Abraham, is true of all his spiritual seed. And consequently when God, in His boundless condescension and love, calls Abraham by the touching and tender name of His friend, the same may, with no less truth-

fulness, be predicated of all his spiritual posterity, —of all who have the same faith as faithful Abraham had.

That the people of God are the friends of God, just as Abraham was, is made inferentially clear from the words which fell from Jesus at various times during His sojourn on earth. Solomon, in speaking prophetically, in the Canticles, of Jesus, represents Him as saying to His followers, in reference to the rich provisions of the gospel feast set before them,—“Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!” And in the days of His flesh, immediately before the scenes which were enacted in Gethsemane and on Mount Calvary, He said to His disciples, in accents of inconceivable tenderness,—“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what the master doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” Now, as Jesus and His Father were one, as will hereafter be more fully shewn, whatever Jesus said of His disciples,

was no less the expression of the Father's feelings towards them.

To be the friend of God, to have God for our friend,—what a precious privilege! The friendships of earth are not always sincere; they are often the reverse. But when we have a sincere friend, we feel ourselves to be fortunate, and favoured in no ordinary degree. "Friendship," we are told, "is the wine of life." It is one of the highest sources of human enjoyment. But we may have sincere friends, without having friends who have the power to perform for us those services of which we stand in need, and which their dispositions would prompt them to render. And even should we have friends whose power to benefit and bless us is as great as their disposition, there is still this infirmity in all earthly friendships,—they are uncertain; and, sooner or later, must cease to be of any avail to us. It is a characteristic of human nature to be fickle. The friendships of the world, and even those, too, of the saints of God, often fluctuate, if they do not altogether fade away. But even should they prove impervious to the mutations of an ever-varying world, they cannot survive

the grave. There, practically at least, all earthly friendships perish. Not so with the friendship of God. It is sincere; it is necessarily so. It is infinite in degree; it could not be otherwise. It is unchangeable; it must be so. It is eternal it will be co-existent with the being of God himself. What a glorious exhibition of the Divine character is here made! How clearly it unfolds the love of God to His people, not merely as a sentiment, but with relation to its practical bearings on them; for the very term friend implies the existence of affection; and such a friend as God is to His saints, insures the practical display of His love towards them in a manner the most blessed!

In contemplating God in the gracious relations which He is revealed in His word as sustaining towards His people, and which furnish precious exhibitions of the love with which He regards them, there is one which must suggest itself to the mind of every experienced Christian, because every experienced Christian must have tasted the sweetness, and felt the sanctifying and sustaining power of that high and holy relationship. We refer to the circumstance of God

speaking of Himself as the *Portion* of His people. The first intimation of God's representing Himself as the portion or inheritance of His people—for the two words have the same meaning—is in the eighteenth chapter and twentieth verse of the book of Numbers. Speaking to Aaron, God thus expresses Himself,—“Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.” David, who, as all know, was more remarkable than any other saint whose name is mentioned in the Old Testament, for the blessedness of the views which he had of God, delighted in the contemplation of his Maker as the portion of his soul,—“The Lord is the portion of my inheritance;” “God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever;” “Thou art my portion, O Lord;” “Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.” These are only a few out of many instances in which David is represented as delighting in the contemplation of God as his portion.

What a wondrous exhibition of the Divine love and condescension is furnished in the fact, that

God should so far stoop as to allow His people to call Him their portion and inheritance ! And He not only permits them so to regard and so to address Him, but He calls Himself their portion. The very idea overwhelms the mind. God the portion of His people ! Who shall unfold all that the expression involves ? Neither man, nor angel—no finite being, ever can. None but God himself can form an adequate conception of what is included in the word. Glorified saints and the angelic hosts will search through all eternity into the subject, and the amount of their knowledge of it will incalculably increase ; yet when more millions of ages shall have passed away than arithmetic can calculate, they will still find themselves at an immeasurable distance from the full comprehension of the term. But though it cannot be fully grasped, either here or hereafter, by any finite mind, we may have some most blessed glimpses of the grace and glory—the grace now and the glory hereafter—which are wrapped up in the precious word. What, we say again—and say, we trust, with adoring minds and grateful hearts—could more tenderly or fully unfold the love which God feels for His

people, and the delight which He takes in them, than that He should be their portion?

What a painful reflection it is, that God should sustain this endearing relationship to His saints, and one so ennobling to them, and yet they not taste the sweetness of it. Yet so it is. There are thousands of God's people who, at this hour, possess Him as their portion or inheritance, whose souls are enveloped in dense darkness, and who are, in a greater or less degree, the victims of a despondency verging on despair, because they have never meditated, as they ought to have done, on the glorious and gracious relationships which He sustains to them. Are any such now reading these pages? If so, let me entreat you, ye privileged and ennobled people of God, to repair at once to a throne of grace for the aid of the Holy Spirit, to enable you to form conceptions of the blessedness there is to be found in this relationship of God to His people. If, believer, you have God for your portion, then you have all that God is, except His essential glory, which cannot be communicated or given to His creatures. His perfections, if not yours in actual possession, or in

such a sense as that you should be essentially a part of God, are yours for all practical purposes. God's infinite wisdom is yours to guide and direct. What a mercy this is to those who feel how deplorably wanting in wisdom they are! How consoling to those who are daily and hourly conscious that their own wisdom is perfect folly! As it is not in man to direct his steps, how inexpressibly precious the promise, that God will guide His people by His counsel, and afterwards receive them to glory! Not less blessed is it to the saint to feel habitually, when painfully impressed with a sense of his own weakness, in all that pertains to spiritual things, that he has the Almighty to strengthen and support him. Knowing that God is his portion, he is enabled to realise the great truth, that in virtue of that infinitely precious possession, he has a power that is omnipotent pledged for his security against all the attacks of his spiritual foes. Thus enabled in all emergencies clearly to apprehend the great truth that God's power is, for all spiritual purposes, his, he feels that he can, with a special propriety, in the presence of any duty, however arduous, to the performance of which he

may be called, and of any trial which he may be appointed to endure,—adopt the language of the man according to God's own heart, and say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord." And again, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." And, then, to render the infinite wisdom and almighty power of God everything to the saint which he could wish, he knows that God is a being of boundless goodness; and, consequently, that His wisdom and His power can never be put forth for any other purpose than the present and eternal well-being of His people. What a portion this! All the perfections of the great God to be the saint's virtually and practically, though not essentially. If a truth so gracious and so glorious were not clearly revealed in the Scriptures, it would be presumption of the most astounding kind to believe it.

But to give an additional blessedness to the great fact that God is the portion of His people, and to set forth that fact still more fully, He graciously condescends to speak of His saints as *His* portion. The first intimation which is made to us of God's people being His portion, occurs in that beautiful prayer of Solomon, which is re-

corded in the eighth chapter and fifty-first verse of the first book of Kings, where, addressing God, the inspired writer says, "For they be thy people, and thine inheritance." The latter word, as before remarked, is synonymous with portion. And again, in the fifty-third verse, Solomon says, "For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance." David delighted to regard the people of God in the light of God's inheritance or portion,—“Save thy people,” he says, in the ninth verse of the twenty-eighth Psalm, “and bless thine inheritance.” And again, in the twelfth verse of the thirty-third Psalm, we hear him pronouncing those to be eminently blessed who are God's inheritance,—“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.” Under the same glorious relationship God speaks of Himself to His people, in the nineteenth chapter and twenty-fifth verse of the book of Isaiah,—“Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.”

It is, let me say again, most blessed thus to

have God himself as our portion, and to realise the gracious truth that we are His portion. The believer is constantly made to feel that he lives in a poor, portionless world. Even the unconverted are unhappy as regards this life, to say nothing of a future state. "Who will shew us any good?" is their unceasing cry. And no one can answer the question. No worldling can point out to them how their wishes may be gratified. They are constrained to confess that they possess no satisfying portion. They are never satisfied with the things they have. They are ever engaged in the eager pursuit of new objects of imaginary enjoyment, which, when they succeed in grasping, only prove as delusive as those which they had previously possessed. They find, in their painful experience, that however diversified may be the good things of the world, as they are called, which they have acquired, there is still a vacuum within—a something which leaves a settled and unceasing sense of dissatisfaction. That which was so fair, and so full of promise in the prospect, turns out a disappointment in the possession. Everything is sooner or later found to have the impress of

disappointment upon it. Nothing satiates their longing souls. The worldling rises up early, sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness, that he may accomplish some fondly-cherished object, from which he confidently anticipates the highest order of enjoyment. It may be he succeeds. But what then? Are his expectations realised? Does he come into the possession of the supreme pleasure of which he made himself so certain? No, never. There is not an instance on record in which any of the world's worshippers have ever been able to say, truthfully, that they have rested from their labours, after having achieved some purpose, in a state of unalloyed content, or to deny that, in their eager pursuit after the perfect bliss which they fancied to be of certain attainment, they had all the while, at an enormous sacrifice, it may be of time, and health, and strength, been pursuing a chimerical object. Just as they have vigorously clutched the desired object, they have heard it say, "Happiness is not in me." After they have run the round of worldly pleasures, they are constrained to come to the same conclusion as Solomon,—that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Like the maniac in the

gospel, they have all their lives long been seeking rest, but finding none. The world never was, and never can be, a suitable or satisfying portion to a being whose spirit is not only immortal in its duration, but which, from its very nature, is unearthly. Experience convinces the men of the world of the utter worthlessness of all things which have the stamp of time upon them. They are compelled to confess, as well as feel, that in all the pleasures they have possessed, they have been grievously disappointed. The very eagerness which they display in their search after new sources of gratification, only proves that they have derived no real bliss from what they formerly regarded as fitted to afford them perfect enjoyment. They are restless as the troubled sea. Make the comprehensive circuit of the world, and you will not find, as before remarked, a single votary of earthly pleasure, who can truthfully tell you that he has found the happiness of which he has been in quest, and that he now neither needs nor wishes for anything more.

But the people of God have much more vivid views of the emptiness and evanescence of the things of this world, than the votaries of earthly

pleasure. They have the testimony of the Divine Word, in addition to their own experience, to the utter incompetency of anything earthly, to minister real happiness to the immortal mind. If, therefore, their hopes were confined to this life, they would indeed be of all men the most miserable. They would be much more unhappy if their affections and their hearts were centred on the objects of time and sense, than the votaries of earthly gratification,—because their principles would prevent their extracting from what is considered worldly good, such pleasures as it is capable of affording. They have, besides, sources of sorrow with which the people of the world are wholly unacquainted. Their spiritual nerves are so delicately strung, their minds are so sensitive, that they find springs of unhappiness where men of less susceptible feelings would not experience any sensible interruption to their felicity. Every succeeding incident in life furnishes to the saint of God a fresh momento of the worthlessness and vanity of the world. Some simple-minded votary of earth, untaught by the experience of his past disappointments, may still delude himself with the notion, just as poor unhappy maniacs do, that

happiness is yet attainable; but the Christian labours under no such delusion. He views the world in its proper light. He sees it in its true colours, and he feels, too, in a way in which none but a believer can feel, what a perfect mockery its pleasures are. Riches and honours are nothing to him. His heart is not set upon them, and they can afford him, even if possessed in the greatest abundance, no real enjoyment. They are found by him to be no better at the best than so many bubbles, which are no sooner grasped than they burst, and vanish from his view. If, therefore, it were possible that a saint could be without hope beyond the present life, he would indeed be an object of profound pity. But, thanks be to God, that is not his condition. He has glorious hopes. He has sources of supreme happiness. Though the world itself be perfectly portionless to him, he has, in a sense, his portion even here. Though not of the world, he has hopes in it with which he would not part for all that earth contains. God is his portion, as He ever has been the portion of His people in every preceding age of the world. The saints have always rejoiced in regarding God in this light.

Friends, riches, luxury, health, and earthly comforts, in all the diversified forms in which they present themselves, constitute no portion to God's people. They cannot rest in anything beneath the sun. They know from experience, as well as from the testimony of Scripture, that there is a large amount of alloy in all things earthly, even when possessed under the most favourable circumstances. They feel that everything that has the impress of time upon it, must and will perish in the using. But in God they have a portion which not only satisfies the utmost cravings of the soul, but which they know shall endure for ever. And not only so, but shall increase in its greatness and glory through all eternity. The saints of God under the Old Testament dispensation, had clear conceptions of the boundless blessing which is involved in the fact of God's people having Him for their portion. This was especially the case with the Psalmist. Hence the emphasis with which he so frequently spoke of God as the portion of his soul. If, as we have shewn, it seemed to be the favourite aspect in which he regarded the Divine Being, surely we, who, under the New Testament dispensation,

have so much clearer views of God in this character, ought to rejoice, with a far greater joy in Him as our portion, than any even of the most privileged of the saints who lived in the dispensation which preceded the present.

There is another endearing relation in which God stands to His people, on which it must ever be delightful to them to dwell. The relation to which we allude is that of *Shepherd*. God sustains the character of a Shepherd to His people. We are all poor, helpless creatures. Left to ourselves, we would in a moment become the prey of those who seek to devour us, just as the wolf seeks to destroy the sheep. What an unspeakable mercy, then, to have a Shepherd to protect us, who is omnipotent in power! We are as ignorant as we are weak and helpless; and if left to ourselves, we would rush at once into dangers which would prove our destruction. What a blessing to have One as our Shepherd who is at once infinite in wisdom and knowledge, and therefore will prevent our rushing on our own ruin! We cannot, any more than the sheep, provide food for ourselves. It must be provided for us: it

must be brought to us, otherwise we would perish of hunger. Who shall estimate the magnitude of that grace which leads God, not only unceasingly to watch over us, but to provide for our spiritual wants? A shepherd is attached to his sheep, and to them there is music in his voice,—which they will hear. And as God cherishes towards us infinitely more love than any earthly shepherd can feel for his sheep, so ought we, as the sheep of His pasture and the flock of His fold, to rejoice in the affection which He feels for us, and the tender solicitude with which His watchful eye is constantly kept on our every step.

There is one passage of Scripture which will at once occur to every mind as beautifully bearing out the blessedness of the relationship which God sustains to His people as their Shepherd. It is a portion of the holy oracles with which we have all been familiar from our earliest years. The twenty-third Psalm is one which the children of Christian parents learn from the moment their infant lips can lisp a portion of the holy oracles. It is one, too, which never loses its interest or its charm to the saint of God.

As it is the first to be uttered by infantile lips, so it has, in myriads of cases, been the last to break forth, in broken accents, from the aged Christian in the closing moments of his earthly existence. Who can count the number of God's people who have gone to glory praying and singing, as their souls were about to be released from their bodies, and to wing their flight to higher and holier regions,—“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” So that, at the last as at the first, this portion of God's Word is to His people inexpressibly precious.

The same relationship of God to His saints is most sweetly unfolded in the fortieth chapter and eleventh verse of the book of Isaiah,—“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

The passage, I am aware, is usually applied to Christ the Son. It does apply to Jesus; but, looking at what precedes and follows, I regard it as having a special reference to God the Father. There is a surpassing sweetness—an incomparable tenderness—in the passage. It would be impossible to employ language which could more fully or forcibly set forth the height and depth, the length and breadth, of the love which God bears to His people. “He shall feed his flock.” He will not merely provide food for them, but He will feed them with His own hand, even as a mother feeds the child that cannot of itself partake of the food necessary for its sustenance. How beautiful the comparison! How touching the tenderness which the very idea implies! But God does more than thus feed His flock like a shepherd. Sheep, especially in their earlier days, and while they continue to be lambs, are the feeblest and most helpless of all the irrational creation. They cannot go to their shepherd. God therefore gathers all His poor, weak, helpless saints with His arm. He stretches out His arm towards them, takes them upon His arms, and then, having placed them in His bosom, He carries them there. The

bosom of God! What an expression! And His people, in their character of lambs, lying nestling, safe and happy in God's bosom! And then remark what follows:—"And shall gently lead those that are with young." A Christian mother only can enter fully into the graciousness and fulness of affection which there are in these words,—"Gently lead those that are with young." Sheep, while feeble and unprotected at all times, require especial attention and gentleness when in that situation. God stooping to adapt Himself to the weakness and helplessness of His people when so circumstanced! God tending His people like a shepherd tending his flock, is a most marvellous and precious truth; but God gently leading those of them whose peculiar condition, as being "with young," renders gentleness, care, and tenderness especially needful, furnishes us with such a view of the tenderness and the condescension of the Father as cannot fail to overwhelm the soul with amazement, love, and gratitude, when we are enabled, by the teachings of the Holy Spirit, to enter in any measure, however feeble, into its blessedness. Amazing condescension! Marvellous love! The copious vocabulary of

heaven—the language in which angels and glorified saints give utterance to their sentiments and emotions—would be ransacked in vain to find words which could more forcibly convey the idea of God's great love to His people, than the language which has just been quoted.

God is again brought before us in the endearing character of a Shepherd in the thirty-first chapter and tenth verse of the book of Jeremiah, where the words occur,—“Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.”

The character of God as a Shepherd is also brought out in those portions of the holy oracles in which His people are spoken of as His *Sheep*. Of these there are many instances, but a few only need be referred to. “He made,” says the Psalmist, “his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.” And again, in the psalm following the one from which this verse is quoted, namely, the seventy-eighth psalm, the sweet singer of Israel addressed God in these confiding and loving words,—“So we thy people, and sheep of thy pasture, will give

thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations." In the seventh verse of the ninety-fifth Psalm, we again hear the man according to God's own heart referring to his Creator in the character of a Shepherd,—“For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” Language almost identically the same occurs in the third verse of the hundredth Psalm,—“Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves: we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” In Ezekiel, the application of the word sheep to God's people, both directly from God himself, and through the mouth of His prophet, is of exceedingly frequent occurrence. It is repeatedly employed in the thirty-fourth chapter of that book. Just take one instance, given in four consecutive verses,—“For thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring

them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel." These are blessed words. What could be more gracious or loving than the language in which God, as the Shepherd of His people, here speaks of them? Happy they who can say, "The Lord is *my* Shepherd."

The same endearing relationship, implied in the word Shepherd as applied to God in regard to His people, is involved in the word *Flock*. That word, as used in Scripture in reference to the people of God, is synonymous with "sheep." And in this sense it is of frequent occurrence in the Old Testament. In the twenty-third chapter, from the first to the third verses of the book of Jeremiah, the word "flock," as applied to the people of God, and implying Him as their Shepherd, is employed in a very impressive manner,—
"Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and

scatter the sheep of my pasture ! saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people, Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them ; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds ; and they shall be fruitful and increase." In Ezekiel the word is of especially frequent occurrence. It is to be met with in almost every verse of the thirty-fourth chapter,—“ My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill : yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.” In the eighth verse of the same chapter, God speaks no fewer than four times of His people as “ my flock.” Again, in the fifteenth verse, “ I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.” “ Therefore,” it is said by Jehovah, in the twenty-second verse, “ will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey.” And, to quote no more instances, God speaks in the last verse of

the same chapter with especial emphasis of His people in the character of His flock, and He, of necessity, as their Shepherd,—“And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God.”

Such are some of the passages of Scripture in which God is either specifically mentioned as sustaining the character of the Shepherd of His people, or in which that character is implied. And, entering fully into its blessedness, God's people have in all ages delighted in contemplating Him in that character. The first part of the twenty-third Psalm has already been quoted, in which David appears as rejoicing in God as his Shepherd. He felt that because God was his Shepherd, he should not want the provisions necessary for him, either as regarded temporal or spiritual things; and he felt no less persuaded that God, as his Shepherd, would protect him from all danger, and guide his feet into safe paths and pleasant pastures. In the eightieth Psalm we have the inspired writer beginning his song of praise by an address to God as the Shepherd of His people,—“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph

like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth." And you, Christian reader, will find the contemplation of God in the character of your Shepherd no less blessed than did the saints in Old Testament times. It is sweet to feel that we have a Shepherd to provide for all our necessities in every emergency in which we may be placed, and that we have an omnipotent God to watch over us with all the tender care which a shepherd feels for his flock. The more fully the relationship is entered into, the more blessedness will every saint of God find to be in it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOVE OF THE FATHER AS UNFOLDED BY INANIMATE EMBLEMS.

THE love of God to His people is illustrated by a variety of comparisons made of Him to inanimate objects, no less than in the relations, as shewn in the preceding chapter, which He sustains to them. He is often spoken of in the Bible as being a *Refuge* to His people. With the Psalmist, that seemed to be a favourite emblem in his meditations on his Maker; and it is one of a very endearing and consoling character. The comparison is manifestly taken from the city of refuge, referred to in the thirty-fifth chapter and from the ninth to the fifteenth verses of the book of Numbers,—“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan, then ye

shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you ; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares. And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger ; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment. And of these cities which ye shall give, six cities shall ye have for refuge. Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge. These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them ; that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither.”

He who had involuntarily or unawares taken the life of a fellow-man, and succeeded in entering the city of refuge, escaped that death which would otherwise have been his doom. The avenger of blood could not pursue him further than the gates of the city. Only imagine what must have been the man-slayer's terror when he knew that the avenger of blood was at his heels in hot pursuit ; and then conceive what must have been his joy when, exhausted by the rapid rate at which he had run to escape for his life, he found

himself within the precincts of the city of refuge. In this we have an appropriate and expressive emblem both of the unconverted sinner fleeing to God, through Christ, for the pardon of his sins and the salvation of his soul, and of the saint repairing to God as his refuge in all the emergencies incident to his Christian career. The sinner flees to God as his refuge, and is safe,—safe from the terrors of a guilty conscience, and safe no less from the pains and penalties of a violated and vengeful law. To enter the city of refuge is, in the case of an unconverted sinner, like entering in at the strait gate, described by our adorable Redeemer. Happy and safe is the sinner who has fled to that city of refuge,—who has entered in at the strait gate.

But it more comports with the design of this work to consider the emblem of God as a refuge in relation to His people. They rejoice in the emblem. It is to them one of surpassing preciousness, because they are so often harassed by the assaults of Satan, so often hotly pursued by temptations from without, and by corruptions from within, threatening them, as they fear, with the loss of their spiritual life. They feel that

they would perish by the hands of the enemies of their souls, if they had not a refuge in the person of God, to which they may at all times resort. God is their refuge, and they repair to Him in all their difficulties and dangers. And when they are conscious of being in Him as their refuge, they have not only a conviction of perfect security, but a feeling of unspeakable comfort. Christ is the road by which God's people run to Him. The way to the ancient cities of refuge was to be smooth, broad, even, direct, so as that the man-slayer might have every facility furnished to him of making good his escape. So it is alike with the sinner and the saint, in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is, both to the unconverted sinner and the troubled saint, a plain, a broad, a direct way to God, as the refuge of all who seek for safety in Him. The sinner has but to believe and be saved; the saint has but, through a renewed and vigorous exercise of the faith already wrought in him by the Holy Spirit, to repair anew by Christ to God as his refuge, to have all his fears dispelled, and to find joy and peace.

Let us glance at a few of the passages in the

Old Testament in which God is spoken of as the refuge of His people. The first instance which occurs of His being so spoken of is in that magnificent description of the glory and goodness of God, which is given in the thirty-third chapter and the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh verses of the book of Deuteronomy,—“There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them.” The word refuge, as applied to God, next occurs in the twenty-second chapter and the second and third verses of the second book of Samuel, where David is described as breaking forth in songs of joy as he contemplated his Creator under this emblem,—“The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.” Again, in the ninth verse of the ninth Psalm, we find David giving utterance to the gladness of his heart as he meditates

on God under the emblem of a refuge,—“The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” But the most emphatic of all the references which the Psalmist makes to God as his refuge and the refuge of God’s people, is in the first to the third verses of the forty-sixth Psalm,—“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

What a remarkable illustration is here presented to us of David’s confidence in God, considered under the emblem in question! Language could not more forcibly set forth the greatness of the confidence which the Psalmist reposed in his Maker as his refuge. So dear to David’s heart was the contemplation of God as his refuge, that, in the seventh verse, he breaks out in the same strain of joyous confidence,—“The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” And again, in the eleventh and last verse, he repeats the words, “The Lord of

hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge." This was the favourite psalm of Luther. In all the great reformer's perplexities and perils, he pressed that psalm to his heart. Adopting the language of David, and in the exercise of a full faith, making it as entirely his own as if it had been originally penned by himself, he maintained a complete calm amidst the storms of persecution by which he was assailed, and remained undismayed when exposed to dangers the most imminent, and even when in the hourly expectation of a violent death.

Listen again to the language of David. In the first verse of the fifty-seventh Psalm he thus addresses God,—“Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me ; for my soul trusteth in thee : yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.” And so in the sixteenth verse of the fifty-ninth Psalm, we again hear him singing the high praises of God as his refuge,—“But I will sing of thy power ; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning : for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble.” In the seventh and eighth verses of the sixty-second Psalm, we

find him speaking of his Maker under the same emblem,—“In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.” Another instance, in the first and second verses of the ninety-first Psalm, ought to be given, because it is a striking one. It forcibly expresses the sense of security which David enjoyed, because he regarded God as his refuge,—“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge, and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.” But we must give one more illustration from the Psalms; it will be the last, but it is one of the most expressive to be found in any portion of the inspired volume. It is contained in the fourth and fifth verses of the one hundred and forty-second Psalm,—“I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.” There is something very remarkable not only in the

words which have been quoted, but in the whole psalm. David is described by himself as having been in deep distress. His very spirit was overwhelmed within him. In that season of sadness and sorrow he looked around on the earth for sympathy and succour; but he found none. All worldly friends, all worldly resources failed him. It was then that he cried unto the Lord, addressing Him as his only refuge. He did not cry to God in vain. His prayer was heard and answered; for in the concluding verse of the psalm we hear him saying,—“The righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.” His was the prayer of faith; he felt perfectly sure that the aid which he so urgently needed, and which he so earnestly sought, would be afforded. See in this the inexpressible importance of a strong faith. It enables the saint to realise the blessing which he supplicates before it is actually in his possession. So true is it, that “faith is the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for.”

Synonymous with the word refuge, as applied to God, is the phrase, *Hiding-place*, when spoken of in reference to Him. David accordingly ad-

dresses God, in the seventh verse of the thirty-second Psalm, in these words,—“Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.” And again, we find him addressing God as his hiding-place in the hundred and fourteenth verse of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm,—“Thou art my hiding-place and my shield: I hope in thy word.”

There is, too, a substantial sameness of import in these other terms which are applied to God, when He is compared to a *Strong Tower*, a *High Tower*, a *Stronghold*, a *Shield*. All these expressions indicate the same thing,—the protecting love of God, and the consequent security of His people when thus specially under His eye, and shielded by His almighty arm. How unutterably blessed it must be to have such a God to whom we may at all times repair, and under whose protecting care we shall be safe, no matter how numerous and powerful, or how malevolent and active, our enemies may be! All the attributes of God are with and for us. It is in them—in His wisdom, His omniscience, His omnipotence, His omnipresence, His goodness—that all

our confidence for the present, and all our hopes for the future, centre and rest. If such a God as we have sought to describe, by means of His own inspired Word, be for us, who can be against us? None effectually so. Neither Satan, nor the world, nor the worst of all our foes,—our own corrupt hearts, will finally or completely prevail in their hostility to us. What greater proof could we have of the love with which God regards us in our present state of being, than when He condescends to represent Himself to us by such assuring and endearing emblems as those to which we have referred?

The emblems illustrative of what God is to His people to which we have alluded, are chiefly intended to impress the saints with a sense of their safety in Him. There is another emblem, which has often proved the source of peace to many a tried saint, namely, that of God as a *Dwelling-place*. “Lord,” says the Psalmist, “thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.” The expression, while involving the idea of perfect security in God, implies something more. It includes the idea no less of delight in God,—of being at home or happy in Him. When

we choose a place for our abode, we are presumed to take a pleasure in that abode. Home is said to be the most attractive word in the English language. Those who repair to God as their dwelling-place, find a home in Him, and enjoy all the blessings and comforts with which we invariably associate the name. And what could be more consoling in the midst of a world in which there is so much to disturb and distress the spirit, than to know that we have a dwelling-place in God,—a home in His very heart? We may thus, in a sense, be said to dwell in God, as He is said to dwell in us. Happy, thrice happy the saint who habitually realises a consciousness of this blessed interchange of dwelling-places,—he dwelling in God, and God in him; he having an abode in the very bosom of God, and God dwelling by His Holy Spirit in his mind and heart.

There is one more inanimate object to which God is compared in Scripture, to which a brief allusion ought to be made. It is that of a *Sun*. "The Lord God," says David, "is a sun and a shield." This is an emblem of God which is replete with sweetness to the saints when the

Holy Spirit enables them to enter, in any measure, into its blessedness. The natural sun, as every one knows, is indispensable not only to the happiness of all creatures, but is absolutely necessary no less to their very existence. The sun, under God, is the great source of life as well as of light and of heat; and as he generates, so he preserves the life of men and of animals. Pluck the sun from the firmament, and all animal life in the world would perish. As God, therefore, is the source and sustainer of all spiritual life, He is appropriately and happily compared to the sun. The sun, too, is the fountain of natural light. Without him all would be darkness of the deepest and densest kind,—a darkness worse than that which came over the land of Egypt—a darkness surpassing that which enveloped the earth when Jesus, the God of nature, the Maker of the sun, and his preserver in the course which he daily runs, expired on the cross. In this respect also God is fitly compared to the sun. He alone is the source of spiritual light. He causes the light first to flash on our souls, enabling us to discern spiritual things; and it is by the continued influences of His Spirit that the

light is preserved in our minds and hearts. We are in ourselves darkness, and who can tell how great is that darkness? But in the Lord we are light. When He pours a flood of light into our souls, we no longer walk in darkness, but become the children of the light

As the natural sun is the source of warmth and of comfort, so in that respect likewise, there is a peculiar propriety in comparing God to the sun. All our spiritual comfort springs from God; all our spiritual happiness has its origin in Him. Out of God all would be cold, cheerless, miserable beyond the power of the mind to conceive, just as the realms of nature are, whenever the light of the sun is not seen and his presence is not felt. God, therefore, could not be more appropriately compared to any object, in reference to what He is to His people, than to the sun. And all the saints of God rejoice in Him in that character, not only in life but in death. It is no less as their Sun than as their Shepherd that they behold, and joy in, God, as they pass through the valley and shadow of death,—“Yea, though I walk,” as all the saints of God will sooner or later have to do, “through

the valley and shadow of death, yet I will fear no evil." God's gracious presence will lighten that dark valley, will cheer that otherwise comfortless path. Even in eternity, too, God will still be a sun to His saints. In heaven, we are told, there shall be no night, because God is to be the sun or source of light to His glorified people. "Their sun will no more go down: for the Lord will be their everlasting light, and their God their glory."

All the emblems to which we have adverted, as shewing what God is to His people, are strikingly illustrative of the love which He bears to them. They are all calculated to set forth the solicitude and affection with which He regards His saints while passing along the rugged road which leads to Himself and to glory. They all, more or less, forcibly shew, that it is His good pleasure that His people should not only be safe and happy in Him, but that they should have an habitual consciousness of their security, and a consequent unspeakable peace of mind.

It cannot be necessary we should dwell on the fact, that in coming to God as we are invited to do, to realise in our soul's sweet experience

what He is to His people under the various emblems in which His grace and glory are thus revealed to His saints,—we can only do so through Christ, just as when we have come to God, and rest and repose in Him, it can only be as we see Him, and find Him to be, in Christ. But thus beholding God the Father in Jesus the Son, and thus coming to God through Christ, every saint ought to feel unutterably blessed. The great mistake which so many of God's people make is, that they rest in Christ instead of in God as He is in Jesus. It is no part of the gospel plan that they should rest in Christ. We are to come to God through Christ, and to rest in God as He is in His beloved Son. If you, my Christian reader, would embody in your conduct what God has revealed in His Word respecting Himself and His Son, you must not regard Christ as your halting place, but must press on until you have come to God himself. Christ is not the end,—God is the end. Christ is but the way. This He says Himself,—“I am the way;” “No one cometh unto the Father but by me.” Then you are, according to His words, to come unto the Father. You are to go to the very foot of

the Father's throne. Nay, you are to go even further than that; you are to have a still closer intimacy with God. You are to come to the very heart of God. Your heart and His must be brought into the most tender and intimate contact. It is thus only that you will, in any adequate measure, discern those manifestations of the overflowing affection there is in His fatherly bosom, which it is the object of these pages to bring vividly before your minds. And if you but thus seek to have correct views of what God in Christ is, and of your duty towards Him in the way of holy nearness to and habitual intercourse with Him,—you will have such perceptions and impressions of the great love wherewith He has loved His people, as will ever make you happy hereafter, instead of regarding Him in that spirit of dread and bondage which brings unutterable wretchedness into the souls of so many of His saints.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOVE OF GOD AS MANIFESTED IN THE MISSION OF CHRIST TO OUR WORLD.

REFERENCE has more than once been made in previous chapters to the fact, which every Christian has, at some time or other, felt in his own painful experience,—that he has seen a more abounding graciousness and a greater tenderness of affection in the Lord Jesus Christ, than in God the Father. And hence the people of God, as has been before observed, instead of seeking, as they ought to do, repose and happiness in the bosom of the Father, turn away from Him, and seek for rest and comfort in the Son. It cannot be too emphatically impressed on Christians, that this is not the scriptural order of things. It is a complete reversal of it. It cannot be too often or earnestly brought before the minds of God's people, that the scriptural order of things is,

that they should not rest solely and finally in Jesus, but that they should ascend through Him up to God the Father, and repose in Him as their God, their Father, their Portion, their All. It is only when the saints have clearly seen this to be the will and way of God, and they have been led by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and the aids of Divine grace, to act in accordance with it, that they can either glorify God or enjoy any real peace of conscience.

There is nothing which can be so much calculated to enlighten the mind of the believer in reference to the relationship of God and of Christ to himself, nor anything which could be more eminently calculated to lead the soul up, through Christ, to God, that it may rest and repose in the bosom of the Father,—as the contemplation of the Lord Jesus in the character of the *manifestor or revealer of God*. It was to unfold the overflowing fulness of affection towards us that there is in the heart of God, that Christ came into the world, and that He lived and laboured, and spoke and acted, during the period of His sojourn on earth, and at last died on the cross. On this point there is an ampli-

tude and explicitness of scriptural testimony for which the people of God cannot be too thankful. There is no uncertainty on the subject. On a matter so inexpressibly important, the *words* and the *works* of Christ speak with a precision, a fulness, and an emphasis which leave nothing to be desired. In the utterances which came from the heart of Jesus, we but see the expressions of the heart of God the Father. In every word He spoke, in every action He performed, Christ only manifested the affection of God towards us. In all that Jesus said, we ought to hear the voice of God; in all those works of mercy which He wrought, we ought to discern the hand and the heart of the Father.

Let us, for a brief period, listen to the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself on this most precious portion of divine truth. But even if we had no express statements of our Lord on the subject, His views and wishes might be inferentially deduced from those observations which fell from Him in the course of His public ministry, when declaring that He came into the world to manifest the Father to mankind. If all His words breathed tenderness and love to the world,

if there was a savour of affection and mercy in every act He performed, surely from these facts it might be safely inferred, taken in conjunction with His express declarations on the subject,—that He came forth from the Father, and was sent into the world by the Father, and appeared among men, to manifest God unto them. If, as He tells us, He dwelt in the bosom of God from all eternity—that He and His Father were one—that He came to do His Father's will—that He must be about His Father's business,—by which we know He meant making God known to the human race,—we may most surely infer that there was a perfect sympathy between His Father and Himself in all the exhibitions of love and mercy which the Saviour made on earth. It is an awful error to suppose, as some do, that while Jesus sojourned here below, His great mission was to propitiate or reconcile God to sinners. God was already propitiated or reconciled, and Jesus came into the world in consequence, to make known the great fact, that God was so propitiated or reconciled, and to urge sinners to be reconciled to God.

But we are not left to mere inferences, how-

ever clearly deducible, with regard to the great truth, that Christ came into the world to manifest God to mankind. The assurances to this effect from Christ's own lips are so very explicit and so very emphatic, that nothing could be more conclusive.

Let us glance at those statements or declarations made by the Lord Jesus himself, as given in the records of the New Testament, that He came into the world to manifest the Father. And let us further take them in the chronological order in which they are to be found in the pages of the evangelists. The first direct intimation of this great and most gracious truth, made by Jesus himself, is to be found in the tenth chapter and fortieth verse of the Gospel according to St Matthew, where He saith, addressing His disciples, who were at the time listening to His words,—“He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.” Here is an announcement of a perfect identification of feeling and sentiment between the Father and the Son, as regards the purposes for which the latter came into the world. Whoever received Christ and His message, would

receive God himself, because Christ came to manifest God, and consequently the message which He delivered was the message of God to mankind. In the eleventh chapter and from the twenty-fifth to the twenty-seventh verses of the Gospel according to St Matthew, we have another very full unfolding of the same truth. Jesus addresses His Father in these words,—“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” So that it was God himself, in the words and works of Christ, that had all this time been revealing the precious things which are referred to in this verse. The Father spoke by and through the Son. He himself was seen and made known in the things, hitherto hid, which Jesus was then engaged in revealing. The twenty-seventh verse is, on this point, in happy harmony with the two verses which precede it,—“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal

him." All things, Jesus tells us, were delivered to Him of His Father. He said nothing, He did nothing, but as He was moved thereto by God. He was but the medium through which His Father was making Himself known to the world. No man, He added, knew the Father, but he to whom Jesus should reveal Him. So that to manifest God to His creatures was the main or most important part of that mission which Christ came into the world to fulfil.

In the sixteenth chapter and seventeenth verse of the Gospel according to St Matthew, we hear Jesus saying to Simon, in that memorable, though brief conversation which they had together as to what Simon's opinion was of Christ, after Simon had confessed Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God,—“Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” So that there was so close a union, so complete an identification, so perfect a sympathy, between God and Christ, that the Father is here represented as revealing Himself to Simon,—clearly referring to the knowledge which the

latter had acquired through his intercourse with the Redeemer.

In the eighteenth chapter and fourteenth verse of the Gospel according to the same evangelist, Jesus, in referring to little children, and to all grown-up persons who had, in spirit, become, through the transforming power of Divine grace, like unto little children, says,—“Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” This shews that God willed, from all eternity, the salvation of all who should believe in His Son; for no wish of God, in a matter so inexpressibly momentous, could have its origin in the mind of God in time. It is plain, therefore, that Christ came into the world in the fulness of time, to make more clearly known than it ever had been before, or ever otherwise could be, that it was the will or wish of God the Father, that none of those of whom Jesus here spoke should perish.

Very clearly and very sweetly is the same truth brought out in the twentieth chapter and twenty-third verse of the Gospel according to

St Matthew, where Jesus, in answer to the application which the mother of Zebedee's children made to Him, most probably with their concurrence, that her two sons should sit the one on His right hand and the other on His left in that kingdom which she and they supposed He was to set up. Addressing Himself to the two sons, who, in answer to a question put by Him to them as to their ability to bear the sufferings which He was about to endure, said they were able,—He remarked:—"Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." In the concluding clause of the verse Jesus very clearly reveals the great truth, that it is God the Father who prepares heaven for all the saints. It was not only His purpose to give them heaven and to bring them to heaven, but it is actually prepared by Himself for their reception. This is a development of the heart of God, made by Jesus far too precious to be overlooked by His people.

Passing over other confirmations of the same

truth which are given by the evangelists Mark and Luke, let us come to some of those more striking ones which are furnished to us in the Gospel by St John. Among the clearest of the intimations made by Christ that He was manifesting the Father, by acting in especial accordance with the Divine will, in virtue of specific instructions from God to that effect, is the passage in the fifth chapter and seventeenth to the twentieth verses,—“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus, and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.” Here is an explicit intimation, that in the work which Jesus had hitherto done He had acted in concert with God. The Father was one with Him in all the words

of grace which had fallen from His lips, and in all the deeds of mercy which He had done. He was but a co-worker with the Father; He was but carrying out the views and wishes of God. The Father was as much to be seen in what Jesus said, and as much to be discovered in what Jesus did, as He was Himself. God, in other words, was in all this speaking and working through and by Christ. Jesus was but the manifestor of the Father. In the fifth chapter and thirty-sixth verse of the Gospel according to St John, we find Jesus appealing to the works which He performed as having been specifically given Him of the Father to do,—“But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.” Nothing could be more conclusive than this. No words could more plainly set forth the fact, that all that Jesus did on earth He did by the special appointment of God, and that consequently He was but the exponent of the good pleasure of His Father, whom He thus manifested to men. The same truth is clearly brought out in the forty-

third verse of the same chapter, where Jesus tells the unbelieving Jews that He had not come in His own, but in His Father's name,—words which clearly imply that He was only acting in consonance with the purposes and pleasure of God, or revealing the heart of God to those among whom He ministered, in the words which He addressed to them, and the works which He performed amongst them.

Proceeding onwards to the eighth chapter and the sixteenth to the nineteenth verses of the Gospel according to St John, we find an explicit assertion of the perfect unity that subsisted between the Father and the Son respecting the great purposes for which Christ came into the world, and also of the blessed truth that Jesus did shew forth the Father,—“I am not alone,” He says, “but I and the Father that sent me.” Those to whom these words were addressed could not fail to perceive their meaning any more than they could misconceive what followed, when He said,—“The Father that sent me beareth witness of me;” and the still more expressive words which succeeded those just quoted,—“If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” Nothing

could more plainly reveal the important truth, that Christ was a faithful representative of God, and that the Father's very heart was to be seen in the words, the works, and the ways of Jesus.

But Christ was resolved that there should be no possibility of the Jews failing to discern His meaning on a point so important, and therefore in this address to them He reiterates the truth in terms alike emphatic and explicit,—“When,” He says, “ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” These are memorable as well as unmistakable words. And again, to the same effect are the words of Jesus in the thirty-eighth verse,—“I speak that which I have seen with my Father.” And yet again, in the forty-second verse,—“If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.”

Coming to the tenth chapter of John's Gospel, there will be found several clear developments of

the same truth, that Christ came forth from God to manifest Him to the world. Let one suffice. "If," He says, "I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him." Most sweetly, as well as plainly, is the same truth brought out on that memorable occasion which immediately preceded the closing scenes of the Saviour's earthly life. He then prayed that God would glorify His own great name in and by Himself. The answer to that prayer was given in a voice from heaven, which said,—“I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The glory of God's grace was thus manifested in the life of our Lord. Nothing could be more explicit than the enunciation of the same truth, which is to be found in the twelfth chapter and the forty-ninth and fiftieth verses of St John, —“For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.”

But we come now to that tender and touching proof of the truth that Christ was the revealer of the Father, which He furnished in the brief conversation which He had, first with Thomas, and afterwards with Philip, recorded in the fourteenth chapter of St John. To the former Jesus said,—“If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also : and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.” No words could more clearly set forth the fact of Jesus being the manifester of God. To Philip, when he asked to be shewn the Father, the Redeemer said,—“Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” Jesus continues the development of the same truth in the tenth and eleventh verses,—“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself : but the Father, that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me : or else believe me for the very works’ sake.” Surely it would not be possible to employ any language which could more fully bring out the

fact of Christ being the manifester of the Father, than the words which have just been quoted. Most sweetly and clearly also is the same truth set forth in the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses, where Jesus says,—“ If a man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings : and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” God the Father is here represented as being so closely identified with the Son, that He will love all those who keep the words of Jesus, and will, with Jesus, abide with them. The words of Jesus, we are also told, which they heard, were not His words, but the words of God himself.

In the sixteenth chapter and twenty-fifth verse, Christ said to His disciples, in reference to the parabolical mode of teaching, to which He occasionally resorted,—“ The time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.” Afterwards, in the twenty-sixth verse, we find Christ commending His disciples because they regarded Him as one sent to reveal the Father unto them ;

and He repeats what He said in a former chapter, that because they did so regard Him, God loved and would continue to love them.

But let us now come to that inconceivably beautiful and tender prayer,—the last of any length recorded as having been offered by Him—which He addressed to His Father in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St John, just before the scene of His crucifixion. “I have,” He says, in the fourth verse, “glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” It is here plainly stated, that all the work which Jesus did on earth was the work of God the Father; so that, in all the compassion, solicitude, and love which were displayed by Jesus towards His disciples, we see no less the manifestation of the compassion, solicitude, and love with which God the Father ever regards His people. How inexpressibly delightful it must be to every believer to feel a thorough persuasion, nay, more, to *know*, that, to every petition which Jesus here addressed to His Father, there was a cordial response in the bosom of God! But that is a point which will come more appropriately under consideration

when we have to speak more particularly of the words and works of Jesus. In the meantime, let us select a few of those sentences from this prayer of Christ to His Father, in which the great fact is established, that Jesus was the manifestor of God during the days of His public ministry on earth. "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." This Christ had done, and would yet do, during the brief period that remained of His sojourn in this world, by doing the will of the Father. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Christ was sent by God, that God might be known in, and through, and by Him. "I have glorified thee on the earth." How? The next sentence explains the way in which God was glorified by Christ,—“I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” All that Jesus did, therefore, was but the fulfilment of the Father’s good pleasure. God worked through His Son. "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world." "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received

them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." Christ's disciples, therefore, clearly apprehended the blessed truth which we are seeking to impress on the minds and imprint on the hearts of all God's people,—that, in everything which Christ said and did, He made known His Father's affection for all that are His. The same truth is so fully and forcibly unfolded in the conclusion of this remarkable prayer, that even had it been nowhere else brought out, it stands forth so plainly here, that no believer could fail to apprehend it,—“O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” Here is a renewed expression of the fact, that Christ's disciples knew that He had been sent by God. And He adds, that He had declared unto them God's name, which was the medium through which they had come by the knowledge of the precious truth, that Christ was the manifester of God the Father.

Let no one say or suppose that we have, in the elucidation of this truth, unnecessarily accumulated proofs. These cannot be either too numerous or too conclusive. It is one of the most precious truths in the Bible. It is, indeed, one great centre truth of divine revelation,—that, in the words and works of Jesus, we see a full manifestation of the heart of God the Father; and therefore Christians cannot be too well grounded in it. If Jesus himself thought it so momentous; if, in His eyes, it was a truth so unutterably blessed, surely we cannot exaggerate its importance. We can never err in viewing any truth in God's Word in the same light as that in which it is regarded by Christ. On the contrary, we would greatly err, and would also deprive ourselves of one of our main sources of comfort, if we attached less importance to any truth than was evidently attached to it by Christ.

No less clear is it, that we are to attach the same importance to particular truths which was attached to them by the inspired writers of the Old and New Testament. Let us, then, glance for a moment or two at what some of the evan-

gels and apostles say respecting this truth. As its enstatement chiefly belongs to the New Testament, being but darkly shadowed forth in the Old, we shall confine ourselves to that part of the Scriptures which was written after the advent of Christ. And it is worthy of notice that, even in the very first chapter of the New Testament, we have a distinct statement of the truth on which we have been seeking to dwell with delight from the commencement of this chapter. Referring to the words of Isaiah, the evangelist Matthew says in the first chapter and twenty-third verse,—“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us.” What could more clearly intimate that Jesus came to represent or manifest the Father? for He is spoken of as God himself—“God with us.” God in our nature, God in our world; consequently, all that Jesus was when on earth, the Father was and is. Whatever tender affection He displayed to His disciples during His sojourn among them, was and is equally felt by the Father for all His people now. Jesus expressed the love

of God just as truly and literally as He expressed His own.

In the first chapter and the first and second verses of the Gospel according to St Mark, we have also a clear revelation of the same truth, though not presented to us in so direct a form. Alluding to what had been written in the prophetic pages of the Old Testament concerning Jesus, when He should be born of a woman and make His appearance in our world, the evangelist says,—“The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” If, therefore, Christ came in the character of a messenger from God, it necessarily follows that the message which He delivered was a message from God. He says, indeed, in so many terms, that He spoke not His own words, but “the words of God.” He but spake as He was instructed; He but acted as He was commanded. The message of Jesus, let it here be remarked, consisted as much in what He did as in what He said; in both His words and His works He but gave expression to the mind and

heart of God the Father. Let us only have a distinct apprehension of Christ in the capacity of a messenger from God, or as the messenger of God, and consequently only speaking and acting from the first moment of His public ministry till the last, as the exponent of God's will,—and then we shall indeed have holy and happy perceptions of the love of God towards all who are His.

There are in the Evangelist Luke inferential teachings of the same precious truth, other than those which came direct from the lips of our Lord himself; but these we pass over, and come to the narrative of John, the beloved disciple. In the very first verse which that evangelist penned, we have a distinct inculcation of the fact, that Christ came into the world to manifest God, or to unfold to us the loving heart of the Father. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If Jesus, therefore, was God, all the messages of mercy He addressed to the children of men, and all the acts of benevolence which He performed, were the words and acts of His Father as well as of Himself. This glorious and gracious truth is

brought out very emphatically in the fourteenth verse of the same chapter,—“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” In Jesus, therefore, there was not only a bright and blessed manifestation of the character of God generally, but an especially striking exhibition of the greatness of His love, as implied in the words, His glory and His grace, which are but other terms denoting the love of the Father.

We now come to the evangelistic narrative as given by St John. That book, as every Christian is aware, is remarkable for the illustrations it furnishes of the great truth as proclaimed by Jesus himself, that He came from heaven to shew forth the Father. The first passage in which this truth is clearly brought out is that which occurs in the fourth chapter and thirty-second verse of the Gospel just mentioned, when, in answer to the entreaties of His disciples that He would partake of some food, they knowing Him to be hungry, He said,—“I have meat to eat that ye know not of;” which, in the thirty-fourth verse, He explained to them to mean, that “His

meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him." So that in everything which Jesus said and did during His sojourn on earth, He only did the will or the work of God the Father. In the fifth chapter and seventeenth verse of the same Gospel, in reference to the reproaches which the Jews heaped upon Him, for the works of mercy which He performed on the Sabbath-day, He said,—“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;” an expression which clearly indicates the perfect harmony which existed between what Jesus did and what were the Father’s purpose and pleasure. In the fifth chapter and nineteenth to the twenty-first verses of the same book by the beloved disciple, the same truth is beautifully elucidated,—“Then answered Jesus, and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.” And again, we have a precious unfolding of the perfect

identity which existed between what God purposed or willed, and what Jesus said and did, in the fifth chapter and the thirtieth to the thirty-second verses of the same evangelist's narrative,—“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true.” In the fifth chapter and the thirty-sixth to the thirty-eighth verses—still quoting from the same book—we have another illustration of the truth, that Jesus came into the world to unfold the loving heart of His Father in heaven,—“But,” He says, “I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.” Here, again, the gracious truth is most clearly brought out, that every

work which Jesus did during the period of His public ministry, was not only in accordance with the Father's will, but was expressly given Him by the Father to do ; so that in the works as well as words of Jesus we witness an unmistakable manifestation of the heart of God towards a world lying in wickedness.

It ought to delight the heart of every saint of God, when he sees the wondrous frequency as well as clearness with which the important truth is brought out by Jesus,—that He came into the world for the purpose of unfolding to men the overflowing affection to sinners which glowed in the heart of God ; for the importance of any truth revealed in the Divine Word may be safely inferred from the prominence which is given to it in the pages of inspiration.

In the sixth chapter and twenty-seventh verse of the Gospel according to St John, we find our Saviour speaking of Himself under the emblem of bread, which God had provided for the spiritual sustenance and strength of His people,—“ Labour not,” He says, “ for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto

you : for him hath God the Father sealed." God has thus put, as it were, His own impress on Jesus. He has affixed His seal to all that He had said or done on earth. In the sixth chapter and thirty-third to the thirty-fifth verses of the same Gospel, He revives the emblem of bread, which He was to prove spiritually to all who should believe on Him, and ascribes that spiritual provision directly to the Father,—“ For,” says He, “ the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life : he that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” But still more strikingly is the fatherly heart of God unfolded by Christ in the sixth chapter and thirty-seventh to the fortieth verses of the book whence we are quoting,—“ All,” He says, “ that the Father giveth me shall come to me : and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me

I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." What a wondrous development there is here of the love which God bears to His people! All the words of mercy which Jesus uttered, and all the works of benevolence which He performed, are thus traced up exclusively to the will of His Father—of which will He represents Himself to be the only exponent or revealer to mankind.

Several passages in the same chapter we intentionally pass over for want of space, setting forth very broadly the truth on which we are anxious that all believers should delight to dwell. But probably in no part of the New Testament, where Jesus himself is not the speaker, is the fact more fully set forth, that Christ came into the world to manifest the character of God, or to "shew us the Father," than in the language of John the Baptist, as recorded in the thirty-second to the thirty-fourth verses of the third chapter of the Gospel by the same writer,—“And what he hath seen and heard,” says the messenger who came

to prepare the way of the Lord, “that he testified; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.” Here we are distinctly told that Christ only testified what He had seen and heard—meaning, of course, from God, while with Him from all eternity in heaven; and that whosoever received the testimony of Jesus, thereby recognised it to be the testimony of God, and not only sealed it as such, but gave his attestation to the great fact, that God is love. We are further told, in terms the most explicit, that Christ only spoke the words of God—that the Spirit was for this purpose given without measure to Him—and that, so great was the love of the Father to the Son, that He hath given all things into His hand. If, therefore, God did take such ineffable delight in Jesus, when in our nature and in our world, what greater proof could be desired, that in everything which fell from the lips of our Lord, and in everything which He did, we see the heart of our Father in heaven?

Let us now look for a moment at one remark-

ably explicit passage, which is to be found in the Acts of the Apostles, relative to the fact that the Lord Jesus was, when on earth, the manifester of the Father. It is contained in the second chapter and twenty-second to the twenty-fourth verses of the Acts of the Apostles,—“Ye men of Israel,” said Peter, addressing his countrymen, “hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” This furnishes a remarkable and most emphatic attestation of the doctrine on which we are dwelling. It is expressly affirmed, that God approved of Christ in reference to all His conduct on earth, and consequently that Jesus acted from first to last in consonance with the will of His Father. But as if that were not enough to bring out the great truth with sufficient clearness, it is added, that all the acts of benevolence and mercy, whether

as regarded this world or the world to come, which were done through the agency of Jesus, were done by God the Father himself. This fact is not left to be deduced from inferential reasonings. It is stated in language the most explicit, in words the most precise, which could be employed. If I frequently pause to lay much stress on express statements of the precious truth which I am seeking to bring out with a fulness and conclusiveness which shall leave no room for doubt, it is because I know that most of God's people need this mode of instruction, and that there are times and seasons when Satan, taking advantage of circumstances, so tempts and tries believers, that nothing but the most direct testimony can suffice to assure their hearts. And this, as every Christian knows who turns over the page of his own experience, is especially the case on this very point. He cannot in his days of darkness, in his hours of temptation, apprehend and realise the great fact, that God's heart is as full of tender affection towards him as that of the Lord Jesus himself.

The next passage which I shall quote as bringing out this truth, will be found in the eighth chapter and thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth verses

of the Epistle to the Romans,—“For I am persuaded,” says Paul, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Here it is especially on the marvellous love of God the Father that the apostle is expatiating; but it will be observed that he represents that love as being shewn in the person and work of Christ. In other words, he tells the Romans to look to Christ for the fullest and most precious exhibition which is given of the love of God. That love is in, or is shewn “in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Omitting all reference to other intervening portions of the New Testament which state the same truth, let us direct attention to the very impressive one which is to be found in the fifth chapter and the eighteenth to the twentieth verses of the second Epistle to the Corinthians,—“All things,” says the apostle, “are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world

unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Observe how explicitly it is said that all things are of God. Among these all things is Christ himself. He came into the world to accomplish God's purposes of mercy and love, and this is done by His reconciling sinners to Himself by Jesus Christ. God the Father is, therefore, to be clearly and uniformly seen in all that Jesus did on earth, just as He is manifested in all that Christ is doing in heaven. It is added, that "God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself," which is but a repetition or confirmation of the same glorious truth, that Christ was and is the manifester of the Father. And so very clear was Paul's perception of the blessed truth, and so profoundly was his soul impressed with it, that, glorying as he well might in the great fact that he and his fellow-apostles were the ambassadors of Christ, he besought, in Christ's name or stead, those to whom he addressed himself, to be reconciled to God. God was revealed in Christ

as being reconciled to them, and he entreated them to be reconciled through Christ to Himself.

I will only give one more confirmation and illustration of the truth which I am seeking to bring vividly before the believer. It is one which could not fail to occur to the mind of the reader, even had I not called attention to it. It is the emphatic passage, rising in some of its expressions to the heights of sublimity, with which the Apostle Paul opens his Epistle to the Hebrews,—"God," he says, "who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." There is something here especially explicit and expressive in the truth, that Christ was but the revealer of the Father during the days of His

ministry on earth. God is described as speaking unto the world by His Son,—speaking through the acts as well as the words of Jesus. In Christ's whole conduct and conversation, from first to last, the mind and heart of God were clearly seen. God was in Christ. In other words, Christ, in relation to what He said and did, as well as in regard to His essential Deity, was God; or, to adopt the language of the passage, Christ was the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. What could be more conclusive than this? If we had no other passage in the New Testament attesting and proving the gracious truth on which we are dwelling, this is so very decisive, that it ought to suffice; for no combination of words could be more conclusive.

It were easy to bring forward many other passages of Scripture from the writings of the apostles, that would further elucidate and illustrate the truth which I am anxious to inscribe as with the point of a diamond on every believer's heart, namely, that in all the gracious sayings and all the merciful doings of Jesus when on earth, He but gave utterance to the feelings and unfolded the affections of His Fa-

ther's heart. But it is not necessary to swell the number of quotations already given. Let us now rather glance at some of the loving *words* which Jesus spoke, and the gracious *deeds* which He performed when here below, keeping our minds intently and steadily fixed on the great fact, that all these words and actions were as much those of the Father as of the Son.

Viewing the *words* of Jesus in this light, how delightful it is to meditate on that gracious series of beatitudes which, like so many brilliant gems, sparkle in the Sermon on the Mount! The reader will either remember, or refer to them, without the need of my aid. To you, who feel yourselves to be the victims of the injustice and the persecution of the world, how blessed to hear the voice and see the heart of God, just as distinctly and clearly as you hear the voice and see the heart of Jesus, in these words, in which Christ says,—“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven.” And to you who are passing through the deep waters of sorrow,

arising from any other source, how inexpressibly sweet to hear the voice and discern the heart of God in the words of Jesus,—“Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.” Then, again, there is a boundless blessedness in the passage contained in the eleventh chapter and the twenty-eighth to the thirtieth verses of this Gospel according to St Matthew,—“Come unto me,” says Jesus, “all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Myriads of souls, weighed down with the burthen of sin as well as with the cares and the crosses of life, have derived much comfort from this precious passage, though their minds had been exclusively fixed on Jesus as the speaker. But there is a double sweetness in the words when they are seen to be no less the words of God than of Christ—when the heart of the Father is as clearly perceived in them as the heart of the Son. Only think that Jesus was on this, as on all other occasions, giving expression to the feelings of His Father—that, in other

words, this is the language of God himself; only think of this, and the words will be invested with a blessedness which, in your experience, they did not previously possess.

We admire, and rejoice in, the inexpressible tenderness with which Jesus regarded the inhabitants of Jerusalem on that memorable occasion when, bursting into a flood of tears, He displayed the depths of His divine compassion for them, and when the tender, yet awfully impressive words proceeded from His lips,—“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” But while deeply touched with this remarkable incident in the remarkable life of our Lord, we too often forget that here He no less unfolded the love of the Father than His own. What Jesus thus felt for the city which was about to be overwhelmed by the deluge of destruction, God felt with an equal intensity of emotion. It is true, that God could not weep as Jesus at the hardness of heart which

had brought upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the dismal doom that was impending over them, because the Godhead, not being susceptible of suffering or of sorrow, cannot weep. It was not Jesus as God that wept; it was His human nature only that betrayed this profound emotion. But in the tears which flowed from the eyes and trickled down the cheeks of the Saviour, we have a most emphatic though silent expression of the heart of God towards His creatures,—an expression not less emphatic than that which is furnished to us of the affection which filled to overflowing the bosom of Jesus.

There is another instance recorded in the New Testament of the Lord Jesus shedding tears; that was when He stood over the grave of Lazarus. On this occasion there were two causes which operated jointly to fill the Redeemer's eyes with tears. He loved Lazarus, and mourned the death of one to whom He was tenderly attached. He also felt for his friends and relations, who were absorbed in grief at the loss of one who was dear to their hearts. He saw them weeping, and He mingled His tears with theirs. What an affectionate Friend! What

a tender-hearted Redeemer! No Christian has ever read this touching narrative without being profoundly impressed with a sense of the Saviour's sympathy and love; but has it always, has it ever occurred to you, my fellow-believer in Jesus, that in all this there was as great an unfolding of the heart of God as of the heart of Christ? Have you had, in this particular case, as clear a perception of the love of the Father to His saints, as of that of the Son—as distinct a recognition of the tender sympathy of God with His sorrowing and suffering people, as of the tender sympathy which Jesus felt and manifested to the friends of Lazarus, who were immersed in grief at the loss of one they so much loved? As was remarked, when referring to the circumstance of Jesus shedding tears over impenitent Jerusalem, when its awful doom was just at hand, God could not furnish any visible manifestation of His feelings towards His people in the way which the Redeemer did. That could only be done by the human nature of the Son. But in those tears of Jesus the eye of an enlightened faith can see as clearly the loving heart of God, as it can the loving heart of Christ. Not only is this a truth

of which every child of God ought sedulously to seek to have a distinct and abiding apprehension, but it is one which is eminently calculated to glorify God and to comfort the believer's own heart. And it is a truth which is no less sanctifying than it is sweet. Nothing could be more adapted to wean the affections of God's people from His creatures, and from all things earthly, and to centre them supremely on Himself, than to have a clear and permanent perception of the great fact, that in the most remarkable instances we have on record of the overflowing affection of Jesus towards His followers in their seasons of sorrow and suffering, we discern a no less marvellous manifestation of the great love wherewith God doth love His people.

The tender sympathy and fervent affection which Jesus felt for His followers when on earth is remarkably illustrated by these passages in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St Matthew, in which, in referring to the time in which He shall come in all His glory, attended by holy angels, to judge the world, He tells us that He will allot to those who stand at His bar their eternal destiny according to their conduct to His

disciples then in this world. After specifying the kind offices which had been rendered to His followers, and which He regarded as rendered to Himself, He says,—“Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.” And to those who never rendered offices of love or of humanity to His disciples,—who never fed them when they were hungry, never gave them water to drink when they were thirsty, clothed them when they were naked, or visited them when sick,—to them He will say,—“Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me.” “And these,” the Saviour adds, “will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous,”—meaning the former,—“into life eternal.” The author of these pages can say with truth, that this portion of God’s Word has often come to his mind with special power, as illustrative of the infinite love of the Saviour for His followers; and it is probable that it may have made a no less profound impression, of the same kind, on the minds of many of those who read this volume. But has it ever occurred to you, my Christian friends, that in all this Jesus did not feel and

speak for Himself only, but for His Father also? Have you seen the heart of God in these words of Jesus as clearly as Christ's own heart? What Jesus said on another occasion might, with equal truth, be said in reference to this most touching representation of His love for His disciples,—“I speak not mine own words, but the words of Him that sent me.” What our Saviour here said was as much the expression of the Father's feelings towards His people, as if the words had been spoken by the First Person of the Trinity.

The only other portion of Scripture to which we shall allude illustrative of the loving and gracious words of Jesus when tabernacling among us, is the one given in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St John, in that memorable and most touching prayer which He offered up to His Father for His disciples. In reading that precious prayer of our Lord, one which has comforted many myriads of sorrowing souls, we should earnestly and ever seek to realise the great truth,—that there is a perfect oneness of feeling and of wish, as well as of word and of action, between the Father and the Son. To express ourselves in other language—we ought

never to lose sight of the fact, that the very circumstance of Jesus praying for a particular thing presupposes a disposition and purpose on the part of God the Father to bestow it. Hence it was that the Saviour could say, in one of His addresses to God,—“For I know that thou hearest me alway.” When, therefore, believer, you see the Son praying to the Father, be sure you have a distinct apprehension of the blessed truth, that God had previously resolved to grant what Jesus is thus seen to ask. Reading the Redeemer’s prayer to His Father in the chapter alluded to, with this fact vividly present to your minds, you will discern such a manifestation of the love of God to you in it, as will, if its perusal be accompanied by the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit, fill your minds with amazement and your hearts with joy. You will feel a force, and see a blessedness in it, which you never felt or perceived before. Indeed, your Saviour begins His prayer to the Father by a distinct recognition of the love of the Father to His saints,—“Glorify,” He says, “thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many

as thou hast given him." Here is an explicit announcement of the fact, that God had given to Jesus those for whom Jesus thus prayed,—than which there could be no greater proof of the Father's love towards them. The same truth is further and more fully unfolded in the sixth verse, in which Christ says,—“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me.” Even yet more clearly is the comforting truth brought out in the ninth and tenth verses,—“I pray for them,” says the Saviour: “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are mine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine.” What a blessed, what an emphatic development of the perfect identity of feeling and affection between the Father and the Son, as regards believers, is here presented to us! How forcibly and beautifully the tenderness of God's affection for His saints is manifested in these words of Jesus!

Viewing the whole of this remarkable prayer of the Redeemer in the light in which I have sought to set it before the minds of the saints, a beauty will be seen and a blessedness be felt in

it, which could not otherwise be discerned or experienced as the eye glances over the words, or as they break on the ear. You, my believing reader, have doubtless been often deeply impressed with a sense of your Saviour's tender affection for you, when you have read that part of His prayer in which He says,—“Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.” But have you seen no less clearly, have you felt no less forcibly, a development of the Father's affection for you, as you have read the verse? The latter is quite as emphatically revealed in the passage as the former. When Jesus thus committed His disciples to His Father, now that He was about to leave them, so far as His bodily presence on earth was concerned, He had no misgivings whatever as to the readiness of the Father cordially to receive the charge—one to Him inexpressibly precious. The very fact of His so committing His disciples to God was a proof that He knew how willing God was to take them under His especial care.

But lest any of God's people in the present day should not see in this prayer of the Saviour for those who were His followers on earth, the same

tender solicitude and overflowing affection for themselves, Jesus, in the twentieth verse, still addressing His Father and His God, adds,—“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” “Their word” was to be both oral and written. And through the written words of the first followers of Christ, men are now, in all parts of the world where His name is known, still brought to the exercise of a saving faith in Him. And so it will be till the end of the gospel dispensation. When Jesus, therefore, in the verse which follows, prays that all His disciples may be one in Himself and in God, as He was in the Father and the Father in Him, He but supplicates that at the hands of God, on behalf of His disciples, which God had previously purposed to impart,—even a perfect oneness with Himself as well as with His Son. And this identity, it will be observed, is an idea which was unutterably dear to the heart of Jesus. It is, let us add, no less so to the heart of God the Father, as manifested in the Son; for Jesus adds, in the twenty-second and twenty-third verses,—“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we

are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." Pause here, and meditate on the latter words,—“hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” What wondrous words! And coming, too, from the lips of our Lord himself! Is not *this* a most marvellous manifestation of the love of God by His Son Jesus Christ?

Just look at one petition more in this precious prayer of Jesus to His Father on behalf of those who not only then believed, but should hereafter believe on His name. “Father,” He says, in the twenty-fourth verse, “I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.” Reading this part of the chapter in the light in which it has been shewn it ought to be read, we have a proof of the Father’s love to us, given as clearly in this prayer of Christ as if God himself had spoken in an audible voice from heaven, and said, “It is my will that those whom I have given to my Son, be with Him where He soon will be in His human body, as He is now in His essential Godhead; that they may behold His

glory." And can any saint who sees the mind and heart of God in this passage, in the light in which we have sought to set them before him, any longer doubt that there is as great a tendency of affection towards His saints, on the part of God the Father, as there is on the part of Christ the Son?

On the works or acts of Jesus, as furnishing manifestations of the loving heart of the Father, it is not necessary to go into detail. The entire life of our Lord, when on earth, was one unvarying exhibition of boundless benevolence. All His acts, indeed, were acts of charity and mercy. No more graphic description could be given of His life than is furnished in the words, "He went about doing good." He was unceasingly engaged in doing His Father's business, which is synonymous with His going about doing good. So that the good which Jesus did, was as much His Father's as His own. Behold, then, the love of God as much as the love of Christ, in all that Jesus did as well as in all that He said! Take fast hold of the precious truth which we have sought to bring prominently before you, and to impress profoundly on your minds, namely, that Christ in all

things manifested the Father, and that consequently there was and is exactly the same intensity of affection for believers in the heart of God, as there was and is in the heart of Christ. Never draw any distinction in this respect between the Father and the Son, but cling tenaciously to, and seek vividly and abidingly to realise, the glorious truth, that the love of God the Father is as great towards you as is the love of God the Son.

CHAPTER VIII.

EXPRESS AND IMPLIED ASSURANCES OF THE LOVE OF GOD THE FATHER.

IN previous chapters we have sought to bring before the minds of the saints a variety of proofs of the love with which God regards His people, as these are to be deduced from the relations which He bears to them, and the manifestation of His character which He has condescended to make to them in the words and works of the Lord Jesus Christ. We would fain and fondly hope that our labours have not been altogether in vain, but that many of the saints have derived consolation from the remarks which we have made, and from the views of the gracious character of God which we have endeavoured to bring impressively before them.

Remembering, however, how differently the people of God are constituted, even as regards

their spiritual nature, and knowing also how ingenious the devices of Satan are to fill their minds with doubts and misgivings as to their being the objects of God's love, it may be well to advert to some of those *express* and *implied* assurances with which the Bible abounds, of the ardent and unchanging affection with which God regards His saints. And let us hope that one or more of these passages from the inspired volume may give that sweet assurance of the Father's love to those who, from diversity of spiritual idiosyncrasy, or some other cause, have failed to derive consolation from such views of God's character as have been already brought before them.

It will at once be seen that, when it is remembered that the Word of God literally teems with *express* declarations of His love for His people, it would be impossible to give all that is said on the subject; we can only select some of those portions of the holy oracles which may be deemed most adapted to minister to the minds of the saints that comfort, which all of them, more or less, need at some period or other of their Christian life.

Those passages which have already been quoted when speaking of God as the God of His people, and as their Father, Portion, Friend, &c., we shall endeavour, as far as may be, not again to transfer to our pages; and those which we intend to adduce, will be selected, as far as circumstances will permit, in their chronological order.

Among the more express declarations of the great love wherewith God loveth His people, there are some which must occur to the minds of all whose memories retain what they have read in His Holy Word. In the thirteenth verse of the seventh chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses told the children of Israel that if they kept the commandments of God He would love and bless them. In the forty-second Psalm and eighth verse, we are told that God "will command his loving-kindness in the day-time." And in the fourth verse of the hundred and third Psalm, David describes the people of God as being "crowned with his loving-kindness and tender mercies," which could only spring from the overflowing and ever-flowing fountain of love that there is in the heart of the Almighty.

And in the eighth verse of the hundred and forty-sixth Psalm, he tells us that "the Lord loveth the righteous." His son Solomon employs substantially the same language, in the ninth verse of the fifteenth chapter of his Proverbs. "The Lord," he says, "loveth him that followeth after righteousness." Very sweet to every believer's taste must be the assurance of God's love, which He gives them through His servant Isaiah, in the forty-third of his prophetic chapter and fourth verse, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." That verse, also, in the sixty-second chapter of the same book, in which it is said, "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee," may almost be regarded as an express declaration of God's love to His people; and coming, as it does, immediately after the verse, "The Lord delighteth in thee," it possesses a peculiar blessedness to the souls of God's saints. But there is no passage in the Old Testament which more forcibly expresses the love of God to His people, than that in the third verse of the thirty-first chapter of the book of Jeremiah—to which I

will again refer in the next chapter—where God himself says,—“I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” In Hosea, in the fourteenth chapter and fourth verse, God himself graciously says to His people, even when they had wandered from Him,—“I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely.”

Coming down to the New Testament, in which there is, of necessity, from the very nature of the gospel dispensation, a clearer and more ample development of the loving heart of a loving God, we meet, in almost every page, with express statements affirmative of the love which the Father cherishes towards His saints. A few of these passages will suffice, especially as all of those to which we refer must be familiar to the mind of every Christian. There is, first of all, that remarkably emphatic declaration of God's love contained in the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of the Gospel according to St John,—“God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” See next the eighth verse of the fifth chapter of the

Epistle to the Romans,—“ But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

The eighth chapter of the same Epistle contains several assurances of the love of God to His saints, in terms as express and emphatic as it were possible to employ. But passing all the others over, let us seek to fix our attention on the two verses which conclude the chapter. With one exception, it may be doubted whether there be, in the compass of God's revealed will, a single passage in which His love is more forcibly or blessedly set forth than in the two verses in question. The exceptional passage is that just quoted, in which God is declared to have “so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” That was the greatest proof which God could give of the magnitude of His love towards a ruined race. The passage in the two concluding verses of the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in addition to the assertion of the greatness of God's love in language almost as strong, affirms the immutability and perpetuity of that love,—“ Neither death, nor life, nor angels,

nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The apostle here seems to exhaust the powers of language in his desire to bring before the minds of the Romans, in the most vivid manner possible, a representation of the greatness, the immutability, and the eternity of God's love toward His saints.

In the fourth verse of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, St Paul speaks of the love of God to His people, as the "great love wherewith he hath loved us." And in the sixteenth verse of the second chapter of his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, he says,—“Now our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us.” In all the benedictions, too, with which the Apostle Paul closes his epistles to the various Churches to which they were addressed, he prays that the love of God the Father may rest and abide on them for ever,—which is but another mode of expressing the great and gracious fact, that the love of God does rest and abide on His people. But there is one portion of

New Testament Scripture which stands out more prominently than any other in the assertion and illustration of the great fact, that God regards His people with the most tender affection. We allude to the third and fourth chapters of the first Epistle of John. They are full of the glorious and gracious theme. "Behold," says the apostle, in the beginning of his third chapter,— "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" In the fourth chapter and the ninth verse, there are those remarkable words— words more precious to the saints of God than would be innumerable worlds—words which we have chosen for the title of this volume—"GOD IS LOVE." And as if the use of the words once were not sufficient, they are repeated in the sixteenth verse,— "And we have known and believed the love that he hath to us. GOD IS LOVE." In the tenth verse the expression occurs,— "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." And in the nineteenth verse, we are told that we love Him, because He first loved us.

These are all assurances of the love with which God regards His people in their present state.

Such assurances are inexpressibly sweet to their taste. But even sweeter still, it may be, are the same assurances when made by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Well, then, Christian reader, your Redeemer hath provided this supplemental and special source of comfort for you. Three instances will be sufficient. In the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St John, and the twenty-seventh verse, Jesus is spoken of as comforting the hearts of His disciples, greatly troubled at the thought of His approaching departure from the world, and their consequent separation, for a season, from Him, by assuring them that they were the objects of the Father's love. "The Father himself," He said, "loveth you." They had never entertained a doubt of their Lord's love. It was, indeed, impossible they could, amidst the many and marked manifestations which they were daily receiving of His tender affection for them. But they had not equally clear and precious perceptions of the love of God the Father; and He therefore, as He was about to leave them, was desirous that they should have this abundant source of comfort in His absence. He was anxious, too, that others should

know that the Father loved His followers as much as He did. Hence His prayer in the twenty-third verse of the next chapter,—“That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” The same sentiment is further expressed in different words in the twenty-sixth verse,—“That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Let us now glance at a few of the *implied assurances* given in the Scriptures, of God’s love to His people.

The presence of God, while it is that which of all things the unconverted regard with the greatest dread, is the most earnestly desired, of all blessings, by God’s people. Even in reference to this world they can say with the Psalmist,—“In thy presence is fulness of joy.” Moses so earnestly desired the sensible enjoyment of the Divine presence, that he prayed that if God’s presence did not go with him, and with the people of Israel, to the mount, He would not carry them up hence. But God graciously gave His servant this assurance,—“My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” Could any one desire a more conclusive proof of the love of God than

was furnished to Moses when this assurance was given him? That were impossible. There is not a blessing which a saint can need, either for time or for eternity, that is not included in the solemn and explicit engagement of Jehovah, that His gracious presence shall accompany the footsteps of His people wheresoever they may go in the pathway of life. And what God, in this passage, promised to Moses, He no less emphatically engages to vouchsafe to all His people of the present day. God's presence is with you, believer; and what better evidence would you have of the love which He bears to you?

Proceeding onwards to the seventh chapter and from the sixth to the ninth verses of the book of Deuteronomy, we are furnished with an unmistakable assurance of the love of God to His people. It is true that God is here speaking especially, through the mouth of his servant Moses, to His ancient people the Jews; but the words have manifestly such a comprehensive spiritual signification, as to apply no less truly to the Israel of New Testament times,—“For,” says Moses, “thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special

people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people ; (for ye were the fewest of all people ;) but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bond-men, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him, and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations." And these blessed words, these gracious assurances of God's love to His people, are in substance repeated in the seventh chapter and the twelfth to the fourteenth verses of the book of Deuteronomy. "He will love thee and bless thee," is one of the declarations in the thirteenth verse. These two passages indeed partake almost as much of an express as of an implied assurance of the Father's affection for His people.

In the intervening books of holy writ there are many passages which, by implication, assure

the saints of God of the great love wherewith He loves them ; but these must be passed over, to prevent such an accumulation of proofs of the precious truth, as would impart an inconvenient bulk to this book. Let us, therefore, come to the Psalms, where such assurances of God's love to His people are so abundant that the difficulty lies in being able to make the most suitable selection. A few, therefore, will suffice:—"For thou, Lord," says David, in the twelfth verse of the fifth Psalm, "wilt bless the righteous ; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield." Can any one doubt that God loves those whom He blesses? If such doubt were possible, it would be removed by the words which follow,— "With favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield." How inexpressibly blessed ! To be encompassed by the favour of God ! And to be encompassed with the Divine favour as with a shield ! The expression implies the protection as well as the love of Him who is the Almighty,—the Lord of heaven and earth.

The twenty-fifth Psalm has ever been one of the sweetest of the "Songs of Israel." Its prayers and praises equally express the expe-

rience and aspirations of the renewed nature. But there are two verses in that glorious psalm which possess a peculiar sweetness to the believer,—“All the paths of the Lord,” it is said in the tenth verse, “are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.” *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to His people.* There is not a single exception. The saint of God, in seasons of sorrow and of sore temptation, is sometimes led to think otherwise. He points to some dispensation of Providence, he names some special trial, and says, at a time when faith is feeble,—“Surely that path through which I am passing cannot be one of mercy to me.” It is, believer. And, what is more, it is, in all probability, the most merciful, though in your experience at the moment, the most painful, of all the paths along which you have had to travel in your pilgrimage to your heavenly home. It is possible, it is not improbable, that you may have a clear perception of the fact before you have closed your earthly journey,—even before you have performed another stage of that journey; but it is certain, absolutely certain, that if you do not see it here,

you will hereafter,—if not in time, in that eternity into which, after a few brief years, or, it may be, months or weeks of further sojourn in this world, you will be introduced. To the writer's own mind there is no reflection more delightful, as there is no conviction more deep, than that, throughout the unending ages of the world which is to come, the glorified saints will not only distinctly perceive, but, with overflowing joy of heart, and in the loftiest strains of praise, unceasingly acknowledge, in the presence of all who inhabit the celestial regions, that those very "paths of the Lord," those very dispensations of His providence, those very trials of their faith, which they found, when they occurred, most difficult to be borne, and which, most probably, they considered at the time as proofs that God had forgotten to be gracious, were the very choicest of the manifestations of His fatherly affection towards them. Cherish, then, believer, the precious words, the blessed assurance, that "*all* the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth;" and see in those words, discern in that assurance, the infinite love of God towards you in your present state of being.

The other verse so inexpressibly precious, is the fourteenth of the twenty-fifth Psalm,—“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.” Weigh well, ye saints of God, these gracious words, and wonder and adore, as ye meditate on them,—“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.” “The *secret* of the Lord.” There is more in those five words, “The secret of the Lord,” than any of God’s people will ever be able to learn out in this world; more than they would be able to comprehend were they to live for myriads of years. Nay, even eternity itself will not be sufficiently long to enable the glorified saints fully to fathom the depth of meaning there is in the words; because no created being ever will or ever can grasp their full import. They involve an infinite tenderness and condescension on the part of God towards His saints. They convey the idea of His raising His people to a level with Himself; they imply a kind of equality between Him and them. God says in effect, that His favour for His saints is so great, and the intimacy between Him and them so close, so tender, so unreserved, that He will

communicate to them His most important secrets. He will make them cognisant of His most gracious and private purposes. He will conceal nothing from them which their minds, in their present undeveloped condition, are capable of comprehending. "He will shew them His covenant," is but another mode of expressing the same unutterably glorious truth, for His covenant includes all His gracious purposes towards His people in time and throughout eternity. How high the calling, how great the dignity, how invaluable the knowledge, of those who are thus so honoured by God as to have His secrets confided to them! Can any saint doubt the love of God towards him, who enters, however imperfectly, into the blessedness of those gracious words?

Sweet to His taste, beyond the power of language to express, has many a saint also found those words to be which are contained in the eighteenth verse of the thirty-third Psalm,—
"Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." The words express at once the tender affection and the ever-watchful solicitude with

which God regards His people in all the diversified circumstances in which they may be placed in their journey through this world,—a world which is full of difficulties and dangers. The Christian who can but realise the assurance of his being ever especially under the eye of a covenant God, will enjoy such a measure of comfort, and have such a sense of safety, as will preclude the possibility of a doubt of the love of God to him, even momentarily entering his mind. The same tender affection and watchful care of God in reference to His people, is expressed in the seventh and eighth verses of the thirty-fourth Psalm,—“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” The Psalmist is here so overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness or love of God, that he breaks out in terms of rapture as he contemplates it,—‘O taste and see that the Lord is good!’ He had so vividly realised a sense of that goodness himself, that he wished all others to be equally partakers of it. And so do all the people of God now. The Chris-

tian's religion is so charitable, so benevolent, so merciful, so diffusive, that he wishes the whole world were equally the recipients of God's grace with himself.

In the hundred and third Psalm, David seems to surpass himself as he expatiates on the love and goodness of God ; but in the thirteenth verse of that noble song he appears to his own mind to have reached the culminating point, when he says,—“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” The term “pitieth,” as before stated, may be translated “loveth.” And we all know how tender is a father's love for his child, and what his pity is for that child when suffering pain, or when unhappy in any way. An infinitely higher love in degree, and an immeasurably deeper pity, are felt and manifested by God towards His people. But as if a father's pity or affection for his child were not sufficient to set forth in an adequate manner God's love and pity for His people, His love and solicitude towards them are compared to those of a mother, which are not only greater still than a father's, but the greatest which can be felt by any creature, rational or irrational. But the passages

which relate to this aspect of our subject will come to be considered more appropriately under another head.

In the book of Isaiah, and also in that of Jeremiah, there are numerous passages which impliedly assure the people of God of the love which He bears to them during their period of probation in this world; but to these we must not particularly refer, because of the space which a full reference would require. The third chapter and seventeenth verse of the book of Zephaniah, so forcibly expresses the love of God to His saints, that it ought not to be passed over,—“The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing.” These are, indeed, most gracious words. It would not be easy to find a passage of Scripture more calculated to minister comfort to the minds of God’s people. God is represented as resting in the love with which He regards His saints. There is an infinite fulness of import in the words. They involve the idea that the very being and bliss of Jehovah are bound up in His love to His saints. It is just as if God himself

had said, by the pen of the prophet,—“If I ceased to love my people, I would cease to be; I could no longer be happy. I rest in them; I am wrapped up in them. They are, in a sense, a part of myself.” And to bring out in still greater relief God’s love for His people, the prophet says, that “He rejoices over them.” And not only so, but “with joy.” The latter words are employed to give greater effect to the former, just as those are which end the verse, to give increased emphasis to both the previous assurances of God’s love to His saints,—“He will joy over thee with singing.” Only try to realise what is contained in the idea of God actually singing aloud because of the overflowing fulness of His joy and rejoicing in His saints. There is matter in the expression which will furnish ample exercise to the mind of the believer during every hour of his existence on earth. And in that expression he will find an inexhaustible subject for his adoring contemplations through all eternity.

But we have dwelt sufficiently long—sufficiently long, we mean, for our space—on those assurances of the love which God bears towards His people in their present state of existence, which are so

abundantly scattered abroad in the pages of the Old Testament. We now, therefore, come to that part of the oracles of God which constitute the New Testament. And here it will not be necessary to enlarge, because from that portion of divine truth we have already transferred to our pages many precious proofs of the love of God to His saints, when speaking of Him as the God and the Father of His people.

A very few more attestations of God's love to His saints while on earth, are all that our space will allow us to give. The eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans contains many such in the thirty-nine verses of which it is composed. Only see the sweetness there is in the very first verse, —“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” If no condemnation, there is necessarily approval on the part of God; if no wrath, there must be love; for all God's creatures are either the objects of His dislike or affection. There is no medium state in which a fallen creature can be. He to whom there is no condemnation is the object of God's infinite and abiding love. The same senti-

ment is fully expressed in the twenty-eighth verse, —“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” *All things working for the good of God’s people? Yes, all things. Not a single exception? No, not one. You cannot, Christian, name any one incident in your history—not the fruit of your own folly—nor will you while you sojourn here on earth—which is not working, and will work, for your good. Could you desire any greater evidence of God’s peculiar regard for you than is furnished by that fact? The same comforting truth, that God loveth you now, is no less clearly unfolded in the other expression which follows,—“To them that love God.” The very fact that you love God is demonstration of the strongest kind that God loves you; for there is not a solitary instance to be met with in the annals of redeeming grace, in which a sinner loved God before he was loved of God. If we have been led to love Him, it is because He first loved us; and so long as we continue to love God, we have, in that simple fact, the clearest and most conclusive proof that could be desired, that God continues to love us. You*

have God's own assurance for this; for He expressly says in the Proverbs,—“I love them that love me; and they that seek me early shall find me.” If you are conscious, beloved reader, that your heart ascends upwards in ardent affection to God, be assured—as assured as you are of your own existence—that God's heart descends towards you in the tenderest regard. This may be a word of enlightenment and comfort to some poor saint whose mind may have been enshrouded in darkness, and assailed with doubts, relative to the love of God towards him.

Two more passages expressive of the truth that God loves His people, are all that we shall quote on this aspect of our glorious subject. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the first chapter and third and fourth verses, the apostle says,—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” What greater proof could God give to His saints of the great love wherewith He loves them, than that

He should bless them with all spiritual blessings? Not one single blessing does He withhold from them that can conduce to their comfort, their sanctity, or their safety. Even God himself, with all reverence be it spoken, could say nothing more expressive; He could do no more for His people.

The other and only remaining passage to which I refer, is very similar in substance to the one just quoted. It will be found in the fourth chapter and the nineteenth verse of the Epistle to the Philippians,—“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” *All* your need. The same comprehensive word again. It is here used in its most enlarged acceptation. It includes all spiritual and all temporal mercies—all blessings for the present, all blessings for the future—every good for time, every good for eternity. And could all this be predicated of God’s saints if they were not the objects of His most tender affection?

There is yet another class of passages of holy writ which no less conclusively, though more indirectly, furnish proofs of the most comforting

kind, of the love of God to His saints. I refer to those brief but pregnant expressions in which there is a special force and felicity, as indicating the Father's love. One instance of the kind is to be found in the words "apple of the eye," as applied to God and His people. Moses, in the tenth verse of the thirty-second chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, thus speaks of Jacob,— "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." There is a largeness of meaning in the latter words, in connexion with the tenderness of God's affection for His people, which it were impossible to grasp. The eye is the most susceptible and delicate part of the human frame,— a thing which requires the greatest care and unceasing watchfulness. The words, therefore, express the sweet and sanctifying truth, that God not only regards His saints with an affection of the most tender kind, but that His gracious providence is unceasingly extended to them, so as to prevent their receiving any hurt at any time or in any circumstances in which they may be placed. David had a clear perception of the

truth, that nothing could more vividly express the idea of God's tender affection for His people, and His ever watchful providence over them, than the words, "the apple of God's eye;" and, therefore, in the eighth verse of his seventeenth Psalm, he prays that God would keep him as the apple of His eye. Zechariah, too, felt that he could employ no language which would set forth more impressively the love of God to His people, than the phrase, "the apple of His eye." Hence he says to the people of God,—“He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye,”—that is, toucheth God himself in His most tender part. With what a wondrous unfolding of the fulness of affection which there is in the Father's heart to His people, does this furnish us!

Then, again, there is an expression of inconceivable sweetness, as setting forth the love of God the Father for His people, in the eighteenth verse and thirtieth chapter of the book of Isaiah, in which God is represented as seated on His throne in heaven, waiting to be gracious. “God waiting to be gracious!” The glorious Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all worlds, He before whom the loftiest angels ever prostrate them-

selves, and in whose presence the highest archangels veil their faces with their wings—so great and glorious a Being *waiting* on His creatures, and those creatures the rebel race descended from fallen Adam! What love, what condescension! Not the creature waiting on God, but God on the creature. It would have been an infinite stoop on the part of the Deity, had He condescended to wait in any way on the loftiest archangel in the realms of bliss, that unceasingly sings His praise, and ever pants to execute His sovereign pleasure; but that He should wait on lapsed and rebellious man, who would, if he could, overthrow the very throne of glory on which He sits, is a thought beneath which the strongest mind must sink. Not only is God thus represented as waiting on His creatures, but as waiting on them for *their* good. He waits to be *gracious*. Again, we can but say,—“Most marvellous love and condescension!” And that we shall feel and say through all eternity.

Very full of comfort to myriads of the saints has been the assurance given by Jesus,—and very full of comfort ought it to be to all the saints,—that God numbers the very hairs of His people’s

head. Surely, if that be so, they must be inconceivably dear to Him,—the objects of a love which passeth all understanding. The words forcibly inculcate the soul-supporting and soul-solacing truth, that there is nothing in your experience, believer, too unimportant for the notice and solicitude of your heavenly Father. Not only are all your goings ordered by Him in reference to the more striking events of your life, but those minor things which your dearest and most intimate friends would pass by without taking the slightest notice of them, are all observed by God, and overruled for your good. How consoling ought it to be to the saints to know that, though they may have no one on earth who cares for them, they are, even down to the minutest circumstances in their lot, the objects of the tender solicitude of Him who made, upholds, and governs the universe! Yes, believer in Jesus, He who counts the stars and calleth them all by their names, has numbered the hairs of your head, and takes an infinite interest in every circumstance, however trivial it may seem to others or even to yourselves, which He knows to have a bearing on your welfare here or your happiness hereafter.

How precious the thought! How inexpressibly delightful the assurance! How it ought to soothe, and must soothe the sorrows of God's saints to know, that when they may have no one on earth—not even the wife of one's bosom, not even the child dear to us as our own soul—who can or does enter into our feelings and share our trials,—our heavenly Father enters fully and sympathetically into them all! It is often in order that we may specially apprehend and realise this gracious truth, that God visits His people with affliction; and surely, therefore, we ought to say, with the Apostle John, when speaking in reference to another mode of manifesting the love of the Father,—“Herein is love!” It may be doubted whether the believer ever has a more blessed apprehension of the tenderness of God's love to him, than when he is enabled clearly to perceive the perfect and tender sympathy which He has with him in all his sorrows, and the interest He takes in circumstances in his history, in which even his most intimate earthly friends would take no interest nor enter into.

I hope that some of these views of God's present love to His people will, through the accom-

panying aid of the Holy Spirit, be made the means of dispelling those doubts of the Father's regard, by which many believers may have been harassed in reference to their own individual circumstances. I trust that what has been advanced may prove the channel through which consolation will be ministered to many mourners in Zion, whose lamentations have sprung from the absence of a realised sense of God's love to their souls, as their covenant God and Father in Christ Jesus their Lord.

CHAPTER IX.

DECLARATION FROM GOD'S OWN LIPS OF HIS LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

KNOWING, as before remarked, that in the spiritual, as in the mental, world, there are individual idiosyncrasies, it may be well to advert to some portions of Scripture in which God is represented as declaring, in the first person, or by His own lips, the love which He cherishes to His saints in their present state of being. The words which are employed by God's inspired servants to set forth His character, ought to be received with the same reverence, and be looked on as possessing the same authority, as those which come directly from His own lips; but yet there are believers, who, from the spiritual idiosyncrasies to which I have referred, may derive comfort from what He says Himself, in the first person, when they fail to receive consolation from the passages we have

quoted, declaratory of His love to His people as given by the patriarchs, the psalmist, the prophets, and the apostles. In this case, as in the other, we can but select a few out of the many portions of holy writ, of this nature, with which both Testaments abound.

Adopting the same order of time as before, the first passage of a gracious kind, as embodying the words of God himself to His people, which I would bring before my readers, is that recorded in the sixth chapter from the twenty-second to the twenty-seventh verses of the book of Numbers,—
“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.” Though these gracious words were primarily addressed to Aaron and his sons, no believer will doubt that they are equally meant for, and no less applicable to, the people of God in every age and in every country.

To be blessed by God, to be kept by God, to have the shinings of His face and the light of His countenance, to have His name put on His people, to receive peace from Him, and to have the assurance that He will be gracious unto them,—surely it would not be easy, rather let me say it would not be possible, to employ language better adapted to convey to the minds of God's saints a conclusive proof of the love which He cherishes towards them. There is not a single blessing for time or for eternity which is not comprehended in the expressions of which the verses we have quoted consist.

The next passage to which I would ask those of the saints of God to look, who may at times, if not habitually, have their fears and misgivings respecting the tenderness of His love towards them, will be found in the fifth chapter and the twenty-ninth verse of the book of Deuteronomy,—“Oh that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” What could more forcibly or fully unfold the loving heart of God than to hear Him thus so emphatically ex-

pressing a wish that His people might be so obedient to His will, and so walk in His ways, as that He might thereby be able to bestow upon them present and eternal blessings? The words seem to the writer to furnish such a view of the greatness of God's love, of the tenderness of God's affection, as ought to fill the believer's mind with amazement, and overwhelm his heart with joy and gratitude. He who is glorious in holiness, and fearful in praises, is here represented as if actually agonising in His own mind for the happiness of His people.

Next, let us set before those saints and servants of God who have their seasons of doubt and darkness respecting His love towards them, the assurance of His affection and of His tender solicitude, which is given in that expressive portion of His Word which is to be found in the forty-first chapter and from the tenth to the fourteenth verses of the book of Isaiah,—“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded:

they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." What a precious passage! What gracious words from the lips of God himself! What greater assurance could any saint desire than is here given of the protecting care and the tender affection which God extends to His people? Inexpressibly touching and condescending are also those words in the thirteenth verse, in which Jehovah says,—“The Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.” Seek, ye saints, to realise, as far as you may, the marvellous amount of meaning there is in these words. Picture to yourselves, as far as your mental capacity will enable you, the wondrous fact embodied in the verse,—that the great Jehovah, the eternal and infinite God, takes the right hand of the believer in

his season of darkness and of doubt, of difficulty and of danger, and pours into his ear words of encouragement and affection,—“Fear not; I will help thee.” What an astonishing exhibition of the condescension of God, as well as of the unutterable tenderness of His love!

In the same and the subsequent chapter there are other assurances from God's own lips of the love with which He regards His people, while on their journey through this waste howling wilderness; but instead of transferring these to our pages, we must content ourselves with a recommendation to our readers to refer to them in their closets. In the forty-third chapter and from the fourth to the seventh verses of the book of Isaiah, there is one of the most express assurances given by Himself of God's regard for His people, which is anywhere to be met with,—“Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not; for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons

from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth ; even every one that is called by my name : for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him ; yea, I have made him."

Mark the words in the fourth verse. God's people are "precious" in His sight. They are gems in His estimation, jewels in His eye. And as if that were not enough to express the place they hold in His esteem, He says they are "honourable." Even that is not all. God goes further still. He explicitly and emphatically says, "I have loved thee." In the seventh verse He speaks of His saints as called by His name, thereby setting forth the blessed truth, that He rejoices in them as His. And then they are formed for His glory. What a thought, that creatures such as we are, who, by our rebellion in the days of our unregeneracy, habitually dishonoured God, should be so changed by His grace, should be so transformed by the power of His Spirit, as that He himself can speak of His own glory being, as it were, increased by us !

Omitting several intermediate passages, in which God is described as speaking by His own lips in accents of affection towards His people,

we come to the forty-ninth chapter and the sixteenth verse of the book of Isaiah, in which, in words which ought never to be absent from the believer's mind, God says,—“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” There is a vastness of meaning in these remarkable words which will never be completely grasped by any finite mind. What an idea does it give of the love and unceasing solicitude of God for us, to think that His people's names should be engraven on the palms of His hands! It forcibly sets forth the great fact, that God's saints are never for one moment absent from His thoughts, and that they are so very dear to Him, that He has, in a sense, made them a part of Himself. The names of poor, worthless creatures such as we are to be engraved on the palms of God's hands! The very idea—let it be repeated—more than masters the comprehension of man.

Very precious to many a saint of God has been that portion of divine truth which is contained in the fifty-fourth chapter and from the fifth to the tenth verses of the book of Isaiah,—“For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the

Holy One of Israel ; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken, and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee ; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment ; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me : for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth ; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

First of all, what could more forcibly convey an idea of the greatness of God's love to His people, than to hear Him emphatically call Himself their husband? There is no relationship in life more close or tender than that of the marriage connexion. And here the great and glorious God, the Maker and the Monarch of

the universe, condescends to speak of Himself as the husband of His saints. He is married to the Church,—joined to her in bonds which never can be broken. His people are represented as a part of Himself. And then there are those beautiful words in the seventh verse,—“For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.” If God seemingly forsakes His saints—for He never does so in reality—it is only for a moment, for a *small* moment. Try, believer in Christ, to realise in your own mind the expressiveness of the phrase. A moment is the most minute division of time of which we can form any idea; but here God speaks of a *small* moment. It is as if He had said,—“You, my people, are so dear to my heart, you have so large and so tender a place in my affections, that I cannot for more than a moment, even for a *small* moment, hide my face from you, and thus appear to be angry with you.” And yet further, to assure the hearts of His saints of the greatness and perpetuity of His love, He even vouchsafes to say that He has sworn that He will not be wroth with them nor rebuke them. And as if even all this were not

sufficient, He condescends to amplify or reiterate the assurance in another form not less forcible. He adds, that “the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed,”—meaning, that the most stable things in creation may and will undergo a change,—but that His tenderness or love shall never be withdrawn or taken from His people. As has been observed in adverting to other passages of God’s holy oracles, which emphatically express the strength and tenderness of His affection for His saints, it were impossible to bring the greatness of His love more vividly before the minds of His people, than is done in the verses in question.

One more passage from Isaiah is all that our limits will permit us to give. It is a precious passage, and will be proved to be so in the experience of all who prayerfully peruse and meditate upon it—in proportion to the fulness with which it is entered into,—“For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I

comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." What God here says to Jerusalem of old, He still says to every individual saint. The maternal relationship—that relationship which has a tenderness in it which none but a mother can appreciate—is here employed by God to make manifest to the minds and hearts of His saints the overflowing fulness and strength of that affection with which they are regarded by Him. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted." Most gracious words! They come not only from the lips, but from the very inmost recesses of the heart of God. Can any saint who reads them have any more distrustful or unkind thoughts of God the Father? Is it possible that any believer can enter fully into their marvellous meaning, and yet doubt the tender love with which God regards His people in their journey through this world?

There is another most touching exhibition of the love of God to His people in their present state of existence, in which—in the same book—that love is brought before us in connexion with a mother's love to her children. In the fifteenth

verse of the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah, God the Father proves His love to us by putting the fact in the form of a question,—“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?” And He himself answers the question,—“Yea, *they* (mothers) may forget, yet will *I* not forget thee.” I make no observations here on these affectionate words from the lips of God himself, because I made a reference to them in a previous chapter.

The prophecies of Jeremiah are rich in specific assurances of the regard which God bears to His people, made directly from His own lips. A few only are all that we can transfer to our pages. In the thirty-first chapter and third verse we read these words,—“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” In the ninth verse God thus expresses Himself,—“They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.” These are the utterances of tender

affection. They shew, in the clearest manner, what a large place the saints occupy in the loving heart of their God and Father. In blessed keeping with the verses which have just been quoted is the fourteenth,—“And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness.” The greatness of God’s love to His people is strikingly brought out in the twentieth verse, in the form of questions, which are not put as if there were any doubt about the preciousness of God’s people to Him, but because there are cases, and this is one of them, in which a question gives greater emphasis to the sentiment intended to be conveyed, than would be given to it by a simple affirmative. “Is Ephraim,” saith God, “my dear son? is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him.” How expressive of the love of God to believers are these words! They are not only “dear” to Him, but they are His “sons.” Every saint is not only a “child” of God, but a *pleasant* child. How ennobling the thought! To be not only sons of God, but *dear* sons;

not only children of God, but *pleasant* children !

Not quoting the gracious assurances which God gives of His love to His people from the thirty-first to the thirty-fourth verses of the same chapter, let us call attention to what is said in the thirty-second chapter and from the thirty-eighth to the forty-first verses of the book of Jeremiah,—“And they shall be my people, and I will be their God : and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them : and I will make 'an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good ; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart, and with my whole soul.” Mark the words in the fortieth verse,—“ And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good.” Amazing condescension, as well as affection, on the part of God ! How it ought to touch the heart of the believer, to think that God should thus stoop to

make a covenant with His creatures to do them good ! The more one meditates on the marvellous words, the more he must be overpowered with wonder and with love, that the great Creator and Governor of the universe—He whom all the hierarchy of heaven serve day and night, and with whose high praises the celestial regions unceasingly resound—should, as it were, come under a positive engagement to bless His people, and do them good !

Passing over the various books which intervene between the prophecies of Jeremiah and the book of Hosea, let us fix our attention for a few moments on the second chapter, the nineteenth and twentieth verses, of the latter book,—“And I will betroth thee unto me for ever ; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies : I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness ; and thou shalt know the Lord.” Here God represents Himself as sustaining towards His people the most affectionate of all relationships. By condescending to become betrothed to them, He connects them with Himself by ties of the strongest and most tender kind. We have often

had occasion, in referring to the loving character of God with regard to His people on earth, to express our wonder, delight, and gratitude at the condescension which He displays ; but in no one part of the inspired volume is that condescension more strikingly manifested than in this passage from Hosea. God betrothed to a worm of the dust—to an insect of an hour—betrothed to an habitual rebel against His government—to one that would, if he could, expel Him from His universe,—surely this is passing strange ! And to be betrothed not for any period of time, or for the whole of one's earthly existence, but for ever, —surely such condescension and love must make their way to every believer's heart ! And then, as if God would exhaust such language as would most fully set our affection forth, He adds that He betrothes Himself “in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies.” Again, the question, often asked before, recurs with increased force,—Can any saint read such words as these, and yet have a shadow of doubt regarding the love that glows in God's heart to him ?

In happy keeping with the verses which have

just been quoted, are the words which are contained in the eleventh chapter and the eighth verse of the same book of Hosea,—“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.” God is here represented as bearing so intense an affection towards His people, as that even all their departures from Him, and all their forgetfulness of Him, cannot prevail upon Him to withdraw His love from them. They are so very dear to Him, that it would seem as if it were an act of violence to His very nature to deal with them as they had deserved, or to leave them to the consequences of their own guilt and folly. His heart, notwithstanding all they are and all that they have done, is still drawn out towards them by cords of affection which cannot be broken.

In the sixth chapter and the second and third verses of the book of Micah, there is an exhibition of God’s tender affection and condescension towards His saints, which has deeply touched, as it well might, the hearts of many of His people,

—“Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.” Here the Most High God, the great and glorious Jehovah, is represented as appealing to inanimate creation, whether His people have not been guilty of the greatest ingratitude and neglect of Him, while His bosom has been filled to overflowing with affection for them, and His conduct has been everything that the most ardent love could suggest. What a marvellous display of the Divine condescension is furnished in the fact, that God should stoop to have a controversy with His creatures, or should plead with them at all, when He might have swept them, by a single breath of His mouth, into the lowest regions of perdition! Surely every saint of God ought to be utterly confounded before his Maker, and be in utter prostration at His feet, when he hears God address him thus,—“O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.” Here, we say it with

all reverence, the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity and the praises thereof, actually asks His creatures to allow Himself to be arraigned before their bar, and challenges them to testify against Him if there be aught in His conduct towards them of which they can justly complain. He appears in the attitude of one who feels as if He could not be happy if His people should be estranged from Him, or think unkindly or unjustly of Him. He goes, as it were, after them, instead of letting them come after Him. The Bible abounds with wondrous displays of the love and condescension of God in His gracious dealings with His people; but the more I meditate on these two verses of Micah, the more does the conviction deepen in my mind,—that they are amongst the most marvellous of this class of passages in the inspired volume.

Somewhat similar is the purport of the third chapter and the tenth verse of the book of Malachi, wherein God calls on His people to prove His love and His readiness to bless them,—“Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not

be room enough to receive it." Not less precious is the proof which God gives of His love to His people, when, in the sixteenth verse of the same chapter, He says,—“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.” How sweet to think that God not only hearkens to and hears the prayers of His people, but that a book of remembrance should be written by Him of all their prayers, their praises, and their good thoughts and actions, just as if there were a merit in them, though we know there is none! Sweet, too, to the believer's taste is the verse which follows,—“And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” God does not here content Himself with saying that His people shall be His, but calls them His “jewels,” which, as before observed, is the most expressive term which He could employ to convey to us the idea of their inexpressible preciousness in His sight.

These are a few of the manifold passages of Scripture in which God expresses, by His own lips, the great love wherewith He loves His people. Were it not for the blinding influence of sin, the suggestions of our own evil hearts, and the devices of Satan, it would be impossible to read these precious words of God himself, and any longer have a single doubt or misgiving regarding the fervency of His affection for His people. That the saints of God ought habitually to recognise, and to rejoice in, their Creator's love, instead of doubting the tenderness of His heart towards them, is proved by the fact, that all the most eminent of His people, in all ages, have been profoundly impressed with a sense of the Father's love, and have given utterance to their feelings in expressions of unbounded confidence and joy, in a consciousness of being the objects of that love.

But lest there should still be some of the saints of God, whose minds and hearts have not been reached either by the declaration of His love to His people, made by prophets and apostles, or by those which are given in the Scriptures as coming direct from His own lips,

let me bring before the view of the still doubting saint, the still troubled believer, a few of the utterances, on the part of His trusting and rejoicing people, which are recorded in such great abundance in various parts of God's holy book.

It cannot be necessary to premise, that wherever we meet in Scripture with utterances expressive of joy and confidence in God, that joy and that confidence could only have had their origin in a consciousness of being the objects of God's love. The first instance of this rejoicing and trust in Jehovah, to which we shall advert, is that contained in the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus, and which is known as the Song of Moses. Though the sublime song had a special reference to the deliverance of the children of Israel from Pharaoh and his hosts, some of its most beautiful parts are equally applicable to spiritual deliverances and favours received from the hand of God,—as, for example, in the second verse,—“The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation : he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation ; my father's God, and I will exalt him.” And again, in the eleventh verse,—“Who is like unto thee,

O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" How must Moses have joyed and rejoiced in a sense of God's goodness as well as His power, when he could employ the language which constitutes this song!

But we pass over all the illustrations which are to be found in the intervening books, in order that we may single out a few of the remarkable expressions of confidence and delight in God which are so numerous in the Psalms. In the third, fourth, and fifth verses of the third Psalm, we hear David thus addressing God,—
"But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I laid me down and slept; I awaked: for the Lord sustained me." In the first and second verses of the ninth Psalm, David thus expresses his trust and his joy in God,—
"I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High." Coming to the twenty-third Psalm, which has proved ex-

quisitely sweet to the taste of all God's people ever since it was penned, it will be seen that there is not a word in it which is not expressive of the unbounded confidence and supreme delight which the sweet singer of Israel felt in God,—“The Lord,” he says, “is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul : he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life ; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” How deep must have been David's sense of the love and goodness of God, when he could pour out his heart in such utterances as these !

In the twenty-eighth Psalm and sixth and seventh verses, the man according to God's own heart exclaims, in the exuberance of his delight and confidence in his Maker,—“Blessed be the

Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications. 'The Lord is my strength and my shield ; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped : therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth ; and with my song will I praise him.'" And in the thirty-first Psalm and nineteenth verse, David breaks out into holy rapture as he meditates on the love or goodness of God, not only towards him, but to all the saints,—“Oh,” he says, “how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee ; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men !” And then, in the twenty-first verse, he thanks God for His special goodness towards himself,—“Blessed be the Lord ; for he hath shewed me his marvelous kindness.”

Omitting many other intermediate expressions of David's love and gratitude to God, and confidence in Him—which he so strongly felt as the fruit of a sense of the love of God to his soul—I would invite especial attention to his utterances on this point as recorded in the sixty-third Psalm, and the first to the eighth verses,—“O God, thou art my God ; early will I seek thee : my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a

dry and thirsty land, where no water is ; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live : I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness ; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips ; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee : thy right hand upholdeth me." See here the fulness of the psalmist's appropriating faith,—“O God, thou art *my* God.” All that follows is grounded on the great fact, that he vividly realised the intimate relationship which subsisted between God and himself. God's loving-kindness, as he had before experienced it, was better to him than anything on earth—better even than life itself. In that loving-kindness his soul would continue to rejoice, as it had been before satisfied with it as with marrow and fatness. And so overflowing was his joy in the contemplation of it, that it would, with its great and gracious Author, be the

subject of his remembrance and meditations on his bed, in the watches of the night. Nor would it suffice that he should silently admire God's loving-kindness to him, and adore Him in secret for it, but he would, on that account, audibly and openly bless the Lord while he had a being. His praise of God on earth would only cease with his earthly life, and then he knew that, in the brighter and better world which would succeed the present, he would unceasingly, so long as eternity itself should last, sing God's praises for His loving-kindness, in far higher and nobler strains than those in which any one ever can sing them in our present imperfect state of existence.

In the fourth and fifth verses of the eighty-sixth Psalm, we see again a striking proof of the clear perception which the man according to God's own heart had of God's great goodness, and of the joy and confidence which that perception of his Maker's character inspired in his mind,—
“Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.” In the fifteenth and sixteenth verses of the eighty-

ninth Psalm, we are presented with another proof of the joy and rejoicing which David experienced from his contemplations of the loving character of God,—“Blessed,” he exclaims, “is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day; and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.”

But we have dwelt sufficiently long on these illustrations of David's confidence and joy in God, as the result of his consciousness of the Divine love, which are so freely furnished in his holy and heavenly songs. In the twelfth chapter of the book of Isaiah, we have a very remarkable and very precious prophetic intimation of the joy and gratitude which the saints of a future period would feel, arising from a vivid apprehension of God's great goodness, and which would be expressed as well as felt when the Holy Spirit's influence should be more abundantly poured out on the minds of men under the gospel dispensation,—“And in that day,” says the evangelical seer, “thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is

turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation ; I will trust, and not be afraid : for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song ; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord ; for he hath done excellent things : this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion : for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.” And in the first verse of the twenty-fifth chapter of the book of Isaiah, the evangelical prophet expresses his own individual confidence and rejoicing in God,—“ O Lord,” he says, “ thou art my God ; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name : for thou hast done wonderful things ; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.” Recurring again to what he saw in prophetic vision, Isaiah, in the ninth verse of the same chapter, says, in that language of faith’s appropriation to which reference has so recently been made,—“ And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is *our* God ; we

have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

One more quotation on this point from the evangelical prophet, is all I shall give, but it is one of surpassing significance and sweetness. In the tenth and eleventh verses of the sixty-first chapter of the book of Isaiah, he thus breaks forth in lofty strains respecting the joy and confidence which he said all the saints experience in their covenant God and Father,—“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the gardes causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”

In the writings of the minor prophets there are various expressions of the same feeling toward God on the part of His people. The pro-

phet Micah says, in the seventh chapter and the seventh and eighth verses,—“Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.” And in the eighteenth verse of the same chapter, we hear him addressing God in these confiding terms,—“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.”

Our concluding quotation from the Old Testament on this aspect of our subject, is one of the most expressive and precious to be met with in any part of the inspired volume,—“Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will

make me to walk upon mine high places." How unutterably great must have been Habakkuk's joy and confidence in God when he could truthfully adopt such remarkable language as this! And what a holy and happy state of mind all those saints of God must be in, who can appropriate to themselves the sentiments, as well as the words, of this most precious portion of revealed truth! Millions of God's people have had their fears dispelled, their sorrows chased away, and their hearts filled with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, when they have been enabled, by the Holy Spirit, to make the language of Habakkuk their own. And why, ye saints of God, whose minds, in His providence, have been brought into contact with this chapter,—why should not the words come to your hearts with the same preciousness and power?

From the New Testament our quotations might be numerous, but we shall only give one, owing to the length to which those from the Old Testament have extended. The one remarkable passage to which we allude will occur to every Christian mind as confirming, in a manner the most emphatic, our views respecting

the joy and confidence which the believer, when his perceptions are unclouded, has of the love of God in Christ to men,—“For I am persuaded,” says Paul, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Language could hardly give more forcible expression to the Christian’s confidence and rejoicing in God, springing from a blessed appropriation of His boundless love in Jesus to ruined man. Nothing above or below, in heaven or on earth—nothing, in short, in the universe, can separate God’s people from His love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Similar passages are largely scattered throughout the whole of the writings of the Apostle Paul. Peter, too, and, indeed, all the apostles, give utterance to feelings of abounding confidence and joy in God, arising from the views which they had formed of His love and goodness, as He is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must content ourselves with a simple recommendation of these passages to the attentive consideration of

those of the people of God who may read these pages.

If it be true, as a rule, in reference to holy Scripture, that whatever was written aforetime was written for our learning; it is no less true, that we are equally bound to derive benefit from the examples set us, both with regard to our feelings and our conduct, by the saints of God, whose experience is recorded in the inspired volume. If all the saints in Old and New Testament times, whose words we have quoted, thus joyed, and rejoiced, and trusted in God, because they had a clear and abiding apprehension of His love towards them, it manifestly becomes our duty to be, in this respect, faithful followers of those who have gone before us. Let us all earnestly pray for, and zealously labour to attain unto, that realising sense of God's great love towards us, which will enable us to repose in Him, at all times, with the simple, unfaltering confidence of children. And for our own happiness, no less than for His glory, let us rejoice in Him with exceeding joy, amid the ever-varying circumstances in which we may be placed in our

pilgrimage through this world. This is alike the duty and the privilege of the believer; and he who fails to perform the duty, deprives himself of pleasures of which none but those who have enjoyed them can form any conception.

CHAPTER X.

GOD'S LOVE TO HIS PEOPLE AS SHEWN IN THEIR SEASONS OF SORROW.

THE people of God have a full share of the troubles and trials of this life. If they have sources of consolation unknown to those who are strangers to redeeming grace, so they have sources of sorrow which are peculiar to themselves. The unconverted enter not into the kingdom of heaven; the people of God do enter there, but not until after they have passed through much tribulation. Their trials spring from a great variety of causes, and are consequently diversified as well as numerous. They relate to the mind as well as to the heart—to the body as well as to the soul—to things which are temporal as well as to those which are of a spiritual nature. Dark providences frequently and largely beset their pathway to their heavenly

home; and when their faith falters, or their views of the gracious character of God become dim, either through the agency of Satan or of inherent corruption in themselves, they are often deeply cast down and sorely distressed. It is only by the saints of God, who may be passing through their deep waters of providential sorrow, looking back to the exhibition of God's gracious character, so abundantly given in His Word, that comfort can be restored to their souls.

With this view, let us first glance at some of the many assurances of God's readiness to rescue from, or support His people in their seasons of *temporal* sorrow, which are to be found in such rich abundance in His holy Word. In bringing before the minds of my readers a few of these passages, it may be well to remark, that it is not always easy to distinguish between those portions of Scripture of an assuring character which primarily relate to providential troubles, and that distress which partakes of an essentially spiritual character. Many of the passages to which we allude refer with almost equal force both to providential and spiritual sorrows. In such cases, it is for the saints themselves to apply such por-

tions of the Word of God to their own peculiar cases.

The first passage to which I invite attention, expressive of the tender and watchful care which God exercises towards His people, in reference to their worldly wellbeing, will be found in the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy from the thirty-second to the thirty-eighth verses,—“For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth; and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice,

that he might instruct thee ; and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire ; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt ; to drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day.”

Though this passage has a primary reference to God’s gracious providential dealings with His ancient people, it is as true at the present day of every individual saint as it was four thousand years ago of the children of Israel. Though there is no absolute certainty, because there is no absolute promise, that God will bring His people out of particular troubles, yet, if it be for the Divine glory and their eternal good, that they should be brought triumphantly through their providential sorrows, that deliverance will most surely be accorded to them. And what more could or would any of God’s people wish? All their own experience, as well as what they see, and have read of the experience of their fellow-

saints, must have conducted them to the conclusion, that God does most wonderfully work temporal deliverances for His people, when those who are not His people are permitted to be crushed or greatly paralysed by them.

If ever, humanly speaking, there was a man upon earth who might be supposed likely to arraign the goodness of God because of the pressure of temporal troubles, that man was Job. Yet hear what he says of the Divine providential goodness in the fifth chapter and from the seventeenth to the twentieth verses,—
 “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth ; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty : for he maketh sore, and bindeth up ; he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles ; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death ; and in war from the power of the sword.” “Happy is the man whom God correcteth !” The word “happy” may with greater propriety be translated “blessed,” because the saints of God are always blessed, though not always conscious of it. “In six troubles, yea, in seven,” God will

deliver His people. He will bring them safely out of all their distresses. The word seven is definitely put for an indefinite number.

Most blessed is that exhibition of God's tender providential affection for His people which the psalmist gives in the thirty-fourth of his delightful songs and from the seventeenth to the nineteenth verses,—“The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.” And in the verse which follows, namely, the twentieth, it is added,—“He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.”

It would not be easy to imagine a more precious assurance than the one in the nineteenth verse,—that though the afflictions of the righteous are many, God delivereth them out of them all. And no less to be prized is the wonderful exhibition of tenderness in the assurance, in the twentieth verse, that God keepeth all His people's bones, so that not one of them is broken.

In the third verse of the forty-first Psalm there is another expression to the same effect, which is no less remarkable for its sweetness, —“The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.” Pause here, ye people of God, and seek to enter as fully as it may be given you by the Divine Spirit to do, into the unutterable blessedness there is in the assurance thus given of the boundless affection which God cherishes towards His saints, when His providential hand lies heavily upon them; and of the solicitude which He ever feels that they should not be overwhelmed by their troubles. It is necessary for their own sakes, as well as for His glory, that they should at times be laid on beds of languishing; but then He makes, with His own gentle hand, moved by His infinitely loving heart, the beds of sickness on which they are stretched. If anything could convey to the minds of God's providentially-trying people, a vivid sense of the amazing tenderness of His love towards them, surely the marvellous words which have just been quoted

are the very words which, of all others, are most adapted for such a purpose.

Coming to the fifty-fifth Psalm and the twenty-second verse, we have an injunction from David, who was himself greatly pressed down by troubles of various kinds, to "cast our burdens on the Lord," accompanied by a positive promise that He will sustain us. And as a further proof of the saints' safety in, and their ultimate deliverance from the troubles that, for a season, weigh heavily upon them, we are assured "that the righteous never shall be moved." No matter, believer, what your burden may be,—cast it upon God, He will receive it. It is His will you should transfer it from yourself to Him. Rather, perhaps, I should say, that He will bear it, agreeably to a passage already quoted, that in all His people's afflictions He is afflicted. Do not mistake the meaning of this passage. God does not say that He will remove your burden. There is no absolute promise, as has been already observed, to that effect in the Divine Word, either in reference to temporal or spiritual pressures. But the pro-

mise is absolute that you shall be strengthened by God to bear whatever burden He lays upon you. He "will sustain thee." What more could any child of God ask at his heavenly Father's hands? What more could he desire? God permits the burden to remain, but then grace is so liberally given to sustain the saint under it, that in effect it ceases practically to be a burden at all, in the sense in which the word is usually understood. Hence we read both in Scripture and in profane history, and hence we see in our daily intercourse with God's people, that trials which would depress and crush the men of the world, are cheerfully borne by them. This is the grand secret of the happiness of the saints, amidst all their troubles in life, and not less so when they feel themselves succumbing to the advances of death. They have cast all their burdens on the Lord, and the assurance of faith that He will sustain them waxes stronger and stronger, because their own past experience comes opportunely at such a season, in confirmation of God's own promise to that effect.

Again passing over a wide interval, we come to the ninety-first Psalm. That song of praise

is emphatically devoted to the development of God's providential goodness towards His people. The first eleven verses of the psalm set the fact of God's providential care very strikingly before us,—“He,” says David, “that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge, and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge

over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Comment on this passage is not needed. Every verse, nay, every word, speaks in language so clear and so forcible, that none can mistake its meaning.

The book of Isaiah is crowded with passages which describe, in the most explicit and emphatic language, the tender and unceasing providential care which God exercises over His people; but the more prominent of these will suggest themselves to the reader's own mind, and therefore need not be transferred to our pages.

Jeremiah, too, occupies much of his book with the same topic; and all the minor prophets make more or less frequent allusions to it. But these must all be passed over, that reference may be made to two singularly emphatic passages in the New Testament, affirmative of the fact of God's providential love and care towards His people.

In the Saviour's Sermon on the Mount, He most forcibly and beautifully brings out the blessed truth, that God's people are ever, even as regards their temporal interests, under His special care. How pointedly, and yet how tenderly, does Jesus rebuke those of His disciples who distrust the providential care of God!

“Take no thought,” He says, “for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

These are all remarkable words,—words which could only come from the lips of Him of whom it was said, “Never man spake like this man.” Yet even more assuring, were that possible, are the words to which the same Divine speaker gave utterance, when, as recorded in the twenty-ninth, thirtieth, and thirty-first verses of the tenth

chapter of the Gospel by St Matthew, He says,—
 “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

There must be something surpassingly sweet to the believer's taste in these two, out of the many gracious utterances which came from the sacred lips of Jesus during His sojourn on earth. What a marvellous unfolding of God's care and condescension, in providence, towards His people is here furnished to us! “The very hairs of your head are all numbered,”—numbered, not by angels, or by any other superior order of intelligences, but by God himself. But as I have before referred to this expression, I will not now recur to it.

But the heaviest of all sorrows to the saints of God are the *sorrows of the soul*. Let us therefore briefly advert to some of those passages in the holy oracles which have a special reference to spiritual troubles. These are often of a diversified kind, even in the experience of the same saint; and, owing to constitutional and other

causes, they are different in different Christians.

But no matter what may be the cause, or how many may be the causes, why believers are cast down,—there are ample means of support and solace in the Word of God. His love to men has led Him to make abundant provision for their support under their troubles, while they last, and for their ultimate deliverance from them. Are you, believer, in *darkness*? Everywhere God is spoken of in His Word, and speaks of Himself, as your sun. His holy oracles, which are but a transcript of Himself, will be a light unto your feet, and a lamp unto your path. Remember the gracious assurance that the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

But instead of a mere general reference or two to passages in which God is spoken of as the light of His people amidst the scenes of darkness through which they have to pass, it may prove consolatory to those saints whose path is thus enveloped in darkness, to have laid before them a few passages, with the places in which they are found, distinctly pointed out,—“There be many

that say," observes David, in the sixth verse of the fourth Psalm,—“Who will shew us any good?” but that is not what God's people say. The language is that of the men of the world. The desire and the prayer of the saints is,—“Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.” That is the great source of their happiness, even in their present state of being, just as the effulgent light of the Divine countenance, by which all darkness will be for ever dispelled, will be the chief element in the happiness of heaven. In the first verse of the twenty-seventh Psalm, the man according to God's own heart rejoiced with unspeakable joy, in being able to proclaim to all around that the Lord was his “light and salvation.” That is a gracious assurance to you who are for a season walking in darkness, which is given in the eleventh verse of the ninety-seventh Psalm,—“Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” Believe the Word of God, all ye saints who feel yourselves to be for a time enshrouded in a darkness at once deep and dense, when it tells you that what is sown for you, you shall in due time reap. “God is the Lord,” says David, in the

twenty-seventh verse of his one hundredth and eighteenth song of praise,—“God is the Lord, who hath shewed us light.” Those saints who cannot at present speak in the past tense, will all ere long be able to employ the language of the psalmist, and say, “God is the Lord, who *hath* shewed us light.” In the nineteenth and twentieth verses of the sixtieth chapter of the book of Isaiah, there is a remarkably sweet unfolding of the blessed truth, that God is and will be the light of those of His people who here below have their days of darkness. “The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

It is reserved for the saints who have passed the portals of glory to realise, in all its fulness and grace, the preciousness of this passage; but in a modified sense God's people can all, more or less largely, set their seals to the fact of its realisation, even in this world. And when they

do, they enjoy such a consciousness of the love of God to them even here, as in their seasons of darkness they could not have believed to be possible. God's people, indeed, notwithstanding all the darkness which at times broods over their minds, and enshrouds their souls, are regarded as the children of light, and are so called by Him. "Ye are all," says Paul, in the fifth verse of the fifth chapter of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians,—“Ye are all the children of the light and of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” And this is strictly true, even when the saints are exclaiming, “How great is that darkness!”—true, as compared with the condition of the unconverted, who are now surrounded by an Egyptian darkness, which is but the prelude, unless God's mercy prevent it, to outer and eternal darkness in the world to come. You, believer, as Peter says in his First Epistle, in the second chapter and ninth verse,—you have been called out of this darkness into God's marvellous light. Bless His holy name for it; and be assured that, ere long, the clouds of darkness which may now, at particular seasons, partially envelop your soul, will all be dispelled for ever.

Even in your darkest moments you may, and ought, to adopt the language of the prophet Micah, when, in the eighth and ninth verses of his last chapter, he breaks out in this confident language,—“ Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy : when I fall, I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me : he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.”

All believers, however frequent and dense may be their days of darkness, will, sooner or later, in the greatness of God’s love, find in their blessed experience, even in this world, that David spoke for them as well as for himself, when, in the fifteenth verse of his eighty-ninth Psalm, he says, —“ Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound : they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.” The candle of the Lord may cease for a season to shine upon His people, but the season will only be a brief one. And when it shines anew it will be with a greater brightness and blessedness than before.

God is His people's *guide* in all the *perplexing* paths of life. You may not know where to turn in particular periods of your life, nor what course to take. You have but to commit your ways to God, and He will bring it to pass. He will guide you by His counsel while here, and afterwards receive you into glory. The psalmist rejoiced exceedingly in this view of the character of God. "The Lord God," he says, in a passage already quoted, "is a sun and shield." And in another place, "The Lord is the light of my countenance, and mine own God for ever." In his glorious songs of praise the places are so numerous in which he rejoices in God as the guide alike of his youth and of his old age, that it is unnecessary to adduce illustrations of the fact. The prophets, too, seemed to have eminently clear and precious perceptions of the character of God when viewed in the relation of a light or guide to His people. "Who," says Isaiah, in the tenth verse of his fiftieth chapter,— "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his God, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his

God." It is a most marvellous proof of the love of God, that He should thus provide for all the perplexing circumstances in which His people may be placed in their pathway to glory. It were easy to fill scores of the pages of this volume with passages from the Word of God to this effect.

But not to multiply instances, let me just bring before the believer who may be in great perplexity, and has no confidence in his own fitness to direct his steps, and feels that he needs alike that light should be poured into his mind, and that he should have an unerring guide to direct him,—some of those words on the subject which come immediately from the mouth of God himself. What could be more gracious on the part of God—what could be more comforting to you who are believers in Jesus, than those words in the eighth verse of the thirty-second Psalm,—“I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” David had the sweet experience of this comforting conviction when, in the fourteenth verse of his forty-eighth Psalm, he said, “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he

will be our guide even unto death." Precious truth! He does not guide His people for a time, and then forsake them. No; He guides them to the last. He will not forsake them or leave them to themselves until He has safely conducted them through the final stage of their journey. Nor does He leave them even then. He then receives them to glory, takes them to Himself that they may be ever with Him in those glorious regions where His guidance is no longer required, because at His right hand there is no darkness nor danger. "And I will," says God, in the sixteenth verse of the forty-second chapter of Isaiah, "bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

The saints of God are often in a state of mind which does not come exactly under any of the categories we have mentioned, but which is to them one of great unhappiness. Their hearts are filled with *fear*. Ask them the reason why, and it may be that they can give you no particular reason for their apprehensions. Paul

expressed the feelings of myriads of Christians of the present day, when he described his own experience in these memorable words,—“Without were fightings, within were fears.” Your fears may not be precisely the same as his. They may have a different origin, they may relate to different objects; but still the unhappiness they cause is substantially the same. There is a fear which all the saints of God ought to have, because it is a scriptural and a salutary fear: they ought ever to be profoundly influenced by filial fear,—that fear of offending God, which is one of the great characteristics of every true Christian. They ought, too, ever to cherish a fear of themselves,—a distrust of their own disposition to, and capacity for, the performance of anything that is spiritually good. It is in reference to this fear that the apostle exhorts the saints of the present day, as he did the Church at Rome, not to be high-minded, but to fear. But this is not the kind of fear to which we allude. It is a doubt or distrust of the grace or the providence of God,—that sort of fear which David felt when he said, “I shall one day perish by the hands of mine enemies.” God’s people frequently fear

that they will not be delivered out of the deep providential troubles into which they are brought; and even the best of them have their seasons of apprehension, that their souls will not be saved at last. Behold, believer, the tenderness of God's love to you in the multiplicity and preciousness of those parts of His Word, in which, in order that your doubts may be dispelled, and your fears scattered to the winds, He speaks by His own lips, in His own person, words of comfort to you. As early in the Old Testament dispensation as the fifteenth chapter and the first verse of the book of Genesis, we hear God graciously saying to His servant Abraham—and what He then said to him, He now says to all who are His spiritual seed,—“Fear not, Abraham: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” Can any one doubt that these words from the lips of God caused His servant's fears to vanish? From that hour Abraham knew not what fear was. To Isaac, Abraham's son, God addressed Himself on a memorable occasion, in nearly the same language. In the twenty-fourth verse of the twenty-sixth chapter of Genesis, we find it thus written,—“And the Lord appeared unto him the

same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed, for my servant Abraham's sake."

Through the mouth of His servant Moses, God also addressed His chosen people, in words to the same effect, when Moses was compelled by advanced years to relinquish their leadership, while they were yet in the wilderness. Speaking of the hostile nations whom they would have to encounter on their way to the promised land, Moses, in the sixth verse of the thirty-first chapter of Deuteronomy, thus expressed himself,—“Be strong, and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” And substantially the same language was addressed to Joshua in one of the subsequent verses, when Moses, by God's command, transferred to him the leadership of the Jews, in order that he might bring them safely to the land of Canaan,—“And the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.”

It is not necessary we should pause here, not even parenthetically, to point out to God's people that all this was eminently typical of that spiritual wilderness through which the saints have to pass on their way to the heavenly Canaan. What a source of consolation then must it be to them to know that God no less says to them, than He did to the children of Israel of old, and to Joshua their newly appointed leader,—“Be strong, and of a good courage, fear not;” “Fear not, neither be dismayed.”

In the prophecies of Isaiah there are numerous passages exhorting the people of God to bid their fears begone. One or two must suffice. That is an assuring passage in the fourth verse of the thirty-fifth chapter,—“Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.” Many a child of God has derived unspeakable comfort from this portion of the volume of inspiration. And it may be, that it will prove no less a blessing to the soul of some fearful saint whose eye is now glancing over these pages. In the forty-first chapter we have also various striking passages

intended to dispel the fears of believers. In the tenth verse God speaks in this wise,—“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” That, too, has proved a spring of comfort to myriads of God’s timid ones; and it is so plain, so emphatic, so abounding in tender love on the part of God, that it could not be otherwise. In the fourteenth verse, God says,—“Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” To my mind there is an especial interest in this verse. How many thousands of timid and trembling saints it may have afforded comfort to, is one of those things which can only be known in those regions of infinite and eternal light, into which all God’s saints will, sooner or later, be introduced. The reason why the verse has to me a special attractiveness is this,—that in a season of great, though happily of but temporary spiritual darkness, and in, too, a dying hour, it comforted the soul of the late Mr Evans, of John Street Chapel, Bedford Row, for fifteen years my beloved

minister, and, without exception, the holiest man I ever met with. So precious was this passage to that eminent servant of God, that, when on a dying bed, and unable to speak or be spoken to, he caused the words to be inscribed in large letters and hung on the curtains, in order that his eyes as well as his soul might feast upon them. In the first and second verses of the forty-third chapter there is another illustration of the same mode of God's manifesting His love to His saints,—“But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” In the very next chapter and in the first four verses, the same language in substance occurs,—“Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have

chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."

One more quotation is all I will give. The passage to which I allude is in the seventh and eighth verses of the fifty-first chapter of the same book,—“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.”

Other passages to the same effect, from other books, both of the old and New Testaments, I am obliged to omit, because to quote them would be to extend unduly this part of my subject. Besides, I am sure I have given a sufficient number to assure the timid believer that his fears are all unfounded, and ought therefore to be dismissed. With assurances so numerous, so explicit, so emphatic, you, my Christian

readers, who may have hitherto been often, if not habitually, of fearful hearts, must now feel that it is no less your duty than your privilege to bid all your apprehensions and timidity depart, and, putting on a cheerful courage, to apply yourself with a hopefulness and vigour you have never before exhibited, to the prosecution of your journey towards your heavenly home.

But the spiritual anxieties of believers often assume another form. The saints of God are distressed at their convictions of their own *weakness*. They feel themselves to be feebleness itself, while their foes are powerful as well as numerous. This was one striking feature in the experience of all the most eminent men of God with whom we are made acquainted in the Bible. David in the Old Testament, and Paul in the New, were remarkable for the frequency and depth of feeling with which they expressed their want of spiritual strength. God, in His infinite love and grace, hath in this respect made most ample provision for this exigency of His people. He is essentially all-powerful. His name is the Almighty. All power belongeth

unto the Lord. But that would not be enough for the saint who is cast down by a sense of his spiritual weakness. Unless he had some assurance that God's omnipotence would be made available for him, he would not derive any consolation from it. But God has graciously promised to put forth His almighty power for the support and security of His saints. He has engaged to impart all needful strength to the weakest believer. One very plain assurance of this is given in the thirty-fifth verse of the sixty-eighth Psalm,—“The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people.” And David himself was comforted with this conviction, when, in the first verse of his twenty-seventh Psalm, he said, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” And in the fourteenth verse of the same Psalm, he exhorts other saints to derive comfort and courage from the same source. “Wait on the Lord,” he says; “be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” In the seventh verse of the Psalm immediately following, David is

again found rejoicing in the fact that God is the strength of His people,—“The Lord is my strength and my shield ; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped : therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth ; and with my song will I praise him,” But perhaps the most remarkable of all the psalmist's expressions of confidence, that the power of God would be enjoyed by him both for his protection and support, are those contained in various verses of the forty-sixth of his devotional pieces, —“God,” says he, joyfully and thankfully, as well as confidently, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble : therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. God is in the midst of her ; she shall not be moved : God shall help her, and that right early. The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” In the twenty-sixth verse of his seventy-third Psalm, David says, “My flesh and my heart faileth : but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” In the

first verse of his eighty-first song of praise, he calls on all God's people to sing aloud unto Him, on the ground that He was their strength. The prophecies of Isaiah abound with blessed views of the character of God as the strength of His people. There is a most encouraging view of God's character in this respect, in the third and fourth verses of the twenty-sixth chapter,—
“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” Very sweet to many a tried believer under a consciousness of his own spiritual feebleness, has been that invitation from God himself to His saints to trust in His strength, which is given in the fifth verse of the following chapter,—
“Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.” In the third verse of the thirty-fifth chapter we are told that God will strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. And in the very next verse, already quoted in confirmation of another view of God's character, we read,—“Be strong, fear

not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." Equally comforting is the assurance given from the twenty-ninth to the thirty-first verses of the fortieth chapter,—“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” In the passage in the tenth verse of the succeeding chapter, lately quoted for another purpose, we have as explicit an assurance given to us as it would be possible for words to convey, that God will furnish all needful strength to His people in their seasons of infirmity,—“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

But passing over the intervening chapters of the remaining books of the Old Testament, and part of the New also, until we come to the

writings of St Paul,—it will be found that as none of God's people, with whose experience, as saints, we are acquainted, had a deeper sense of their own weakness than he, so no one had greater confidence or joy in the conviction, that God is the strength of all who trust in Him. Only hear his precious utterances on this point in the fourth chapter of his Second Epistle to the Corinthians from the seventh to the sixteenth verses,—“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the

Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." It was the fulness of Paul's conviction of his own weakness, and of God's strength, that led him, in the twelfth chapter of the same Epistle and the tenth verse, to give expression to a state of feeling which, to the men of the world, must appear anomalous. "I take pleasure," he says, "in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake : for when I am weak, then am I strong." See also how fully and felicitously the blessed truth, that God is the strength of His people, is brought out in the nineteenth verse of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians,—“That ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.” In the sixteenth verse of the third chapter, there is another emphatic recognition of the consoling truth, that Christians do

not stand in their own strength, which is synonymous with perfect weakness, but in the strength of God,—“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” Similar in substance is the eleventh verse of the first chapter to the Colossians,—“Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.” And Peter, in the fifth verse of the first chapter of his First Epistle, ascribes the salvation of all who are finally brought to glory, to the power of God. “Who are kept,” he says, “by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” It is the power of God which secures the salvation of the saint; and the medium through which that power is made available to the believer, is the grace of faith. And lastly, not to extend our illustrations any further, Jude winds up his brief Epistle by committing all to whom his message was addressed, to the power of God. “Now unto him,” he says, in the two closing verses, “that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory

and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

Surely no Christian can fail to discern in such abundant provision as God is proved in the passages we have quoted, to have made to meet the exigencies of His saints, arising from their spiritual weakness,—a remarkable evidence of the great love wherewith He loves them in time, as He loved from all eternity. You, believer, ought always to rejoice in the ample provision which your covenant God and Father has thus made for your great and manifold infirmities. David eminently did this. Hence the great frequency with which we find him rejoicing in and addressing God as his strength, and his sole dependence. “I will go in the strength of the Lord.” And you, Christian, have the never-failing promise to cheer and support you,—“As thy day is, so thy strength shall be.”

It remains to notice briefly another class of spiritual sorrows, arising from a particular source, for which God in His great love has also made ample provision. I allude to those which spring from a consciousness of having grievously departed from God, or, in other words, become

backsliders. The saints do all, more or less, at one period or other of their Christian course, backslide from God; but in many cases their acts of backsliding become so great, and to their own minds partake of so aggravated a character, when the Holy Spirit reveals to them the number and enormity of their departures from God, that they are overwhelmed with feelings of distress which verge on despair. Even for such, God has graciously made abundant provision. He brings them back by such manifestations to their souls of His loving character, and of the depths of His forgiving heart, as fill their minds with mingled emotions of amazement, affection, and gratitude.

Still adopting the chronological order of texts bearing on the backslidings of God's people, His willingness that they should return to Him, and the rich provisions He has made for their restoration,—let us point attention to a passage in verses twenty-nine, thirty, and thirty-one of the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy, from which many a backsliding saint has derived great comfort,—“If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy

heart, and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice ; for the Lord thy God is a merciful God ; he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers, which he sware unto them.”

Though these words were formerly addressed to God's ancient Israel, they are no less meant for the spiritual Israel of the present day, and of all periods under the gospel dispensation. It is a heart-cheering thought, that it is never too late to return to God ; but that, however long deferred that return may be, He will mercifully receive His backsliding creatures. But because God will, at the latest moment, gladly welcome the return of the backslider, let no one on that account delay his return. That would be presumption of the most daring and criminal kind. It would be turning the grace of God into licentiousness. As Satan suggests to the unconverted, when they first experience in their minds profound convictions of sin, that it will be time enough to be converted by and by, so he also suggests to the

backslider, who bethinks himself of returning to the gracious Being from whom he has wandered, that it will do as well to return at some indefinite time hereafter as now. Let every backslider be on his guard against that device of his soul's subtle enemy. Remember that every day's delay increases the danger of never returning at all. And not only does delay to return to that God against whom he has revolted, increase the difficulty of the return, but every hour's procrastination deepens the dishonour done to God by the saint's departure from Him. Let me here, by way of parenthesis, drop a warning word to backsliders. You, who thus hesitate to return to that gracious and long-suffering Being, from whom you have wandered, have great reason to fear whether you have yet in reality resolved to return at all ; and great ground, let me add, to doubt whether you ever stood in real covenant relationship to God. There is no more alarming symptom than for a backslider to hesitate about his immediate return to God,—none which renders deep searching of heart, as in the sight of the great Heart-searcher, more urgently necessary. To God's people, therefore, when they have strayed from His paths, as well

as to those of the unconverted, who may chance to glance at these pages, I would earnestly and emphatically say, "Beware of more convenient seasons." Such seasons seldom come. The expectation of them, and the waiting for them, have contributed more than any other cause, and more, probably, than all other causes put together, to crowd with lost souls the regions below.

A remarkable instance of God's readiness to receive returning sinners, is given in the third verse of the seventh chapter of the First Book of Samuel,—“And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only; and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”

Though in this case, as in the one already quoted, the principal reference is to God's ancient people, in relation to their temporal condition, the assurance is no less explicit and emphatic of spiritual deliverance to all who sincerely seek to renounce their backslidings, and turn again to God. Very similar in spirit, and not dissimilar in words,

is that other passage in the thirtieth chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles and the eighth and ninth verses,—“Now, be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever; and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.”

Surely such gracious words as those, with this earnest and powerful appeal to the Israelites of old to return to God, ought to soften the heart of every backslider of the present day who hears them,—“For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.” And will you not return to God, ye backslider, if any such there be, whose eye now rests on these words? What more could God say to you, with the view of bringing you back to Himself?

The Book of Psalms contains many attestations of the willingness of God to receive the return of His saints ; but we must omit all reference to them, because there are others to which we specially wish to call the attention of our readers. Isaiah abounds with such passages. There is one of especial preciousness in the twenty-first, twenty-second, and twenty-third verses of the forty-fourth chapter. Though God's people had often grievously departed from Him, and though they were in some respects even then at a distance from Him, as is evident from the appeal to them to return, yet He thus graciously and affectionately addresses them,—“Remember these, O Jacob and Israel ; for thou art my servant : I have formed thee ; thou art my servant : O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins : return unto me ; for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens ; for the Lord hath done it : shout, ye lower parts of the earth ; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein : for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.” But, assuring as these verses are, there is a much more

direct appeal to backsliders to return to God in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth verses of the third chapter of Jeremiah,—“Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you : for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord ; for I am married unto you : and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” There is a world of gospel truth, of gospel love, and of gospel mercy here. Not only is the invitation given to return to God from whom they had departed, but the assurance of His merciful character is given in the most emphatic manner. And as if one assurance of God’s merciful disposition were not enough, it is repeated in the same energetic terms. Then observe that all that is required of God’s backsliding people is, that they should acknowledge their iniquity in having

transgressed against Him, and not obeying His voice. But, most marvellous and gracious of all, —listen to the unfolding of God's infinite condescension and love which is given in the words, "For I am married unto you." That God should be married to any of His creatures, however exalted, and even though perfectly innocent, were truly wonderful! But that He should be married to the descendants of fallen Adam, is indeed inconceivably amazing! But the climax of astonishment has not yet been reached. It is to come. God married to His people, even when in a state of backsliding from Him! That is indeed a matter for such astonishment, that the more one tries to sound its depths, the more one finds them to be unfathomable. The next thing calculated to fill our minds with surpassing wonder is, that any backslider, after receiving so express and emphatic an assurance from God, that He is married even to backsliders, could hesitate one instant in returning to Him. The appeal which God thus made to His backsliding people of old was successful. It met with a ready response; for we find in the twenty-second verse of the same chapter, in response to the appeal as there repeated,

coupled with an assurance that He would heal their backslidings,—“Behold, we come unto thee ; for thou art the Lord our God.” Will you not, my backsliding reader, do the same? Will you not take with you the same words, and return to your Maker and Monarch? Will you not say, “Behold, I come unto thee ; for thou art the Lord my God.”

In the seventh, eighth, and ninth verses of the thirty-third chapter of the same book, there is a touching reference to God’s readiness to bring His backsliding Israel back to Himself, and then to bestow abundant blessings on them ; and though the words primarily relate to the Jews in their national capacity, and to their temporal condition, they are no less applicable to all God’s people now, with respect to their spiritual experience. “I will,” says God, “cause the captivity of Judah, and the captivity of Israel, to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me ; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be to me a name of

joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity, that I procure unto it."

Brief as is the Book of Hosea, it is rich in assurances of God's willingness to receive the returning backslider. What could be more tender, what could be more calculated to touch the hearts of those who have wandered from God, than the way in which He himself speaks directly to His ancient people, who had so grievously backslidden from Him? "How," God says, in the eighth, ninth, and tenth verses of the eleventh chapter,—“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after the Lord; he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall

tremble from the west." In the first four verses of the fourteenth chapter, we have a gracious exhibition of God's forbearance towards His backsliding people, and His readiness to welcome them back to Himself. "O Israel," he says, "return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."

A number of passages similar in substance to this, might be given from various other books, but that would be to multiply quotations to an undue extent. What more, to use with all reverence God's own most gracious words, could He have said, or what more could He have done, than He has said and done to bring back His wandering people? Let me fondly hope, as well as fervently pray, that what I have here endea-

voured to bring before God's backsliding saints, relative to His love, His long-suffering, and His willingness to receive them back again to His bosom, will be blessed effectually for that purpose, to many a poor truant soul. And let me no less fondly hope, that what I have said respecting those other provisions which God has so graciously and abundantly made for the comfort of His people in all the diversified circumstances of sorrow in which they may be placed, may be eminently and eternally blessed to their souls. Let me also with equal earnestness express the hope, that what has been advanced in various parts of this chapter, has fully satisfied all who have read these pages, that in *all* God's providential and spiritual dealings with His saints, He shews that His name and His nature is Love.

CHAPTER XI.

FURTHER PROOFS OF THE FATHER'S LOVE TO HIS SAINTS IN THEIR SEASONS OF SORROW.

IN the previous chapter I have gone much further than I at first intended in the specification of the sorrows which so often spring up in the believer's soul, as well as in my enumeration of the troubles which chiefly relate to his physical condition. Let me, therefore, in my remaining observations on the subject, generalise what I shall say, as much as is practicable. Be a believer's troubles or trials what they may, he is apt to regard them as so many proofs that he is not the object of God's favour. He feels with the Psalmist, when he was enveloped in clouds of temporary darkness, that God has forgotten to be gracious. Not only is the conclusion without foundation, but visitations of an afflictive character, so far from being indications that God

has ceased to regard His saints with the same favour as before, are tokens of His *special* Fatherly regard. It is just because God loves His people with tender affection that He lays His hand upon them. Affliction is a necessary part of their inheritance. It is the most important ingredient in that which is their portion. You cannot have forgotten the words of Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews, the twelfth chapter and eighth verse, where he says,—“If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” The son is the heir; he inherits his father's substance; and the only real proof of ownership or heirship, is that of being tried and troubled in your journey to the possession of the glorious portion which is provided for you in heaven. If, indeed, there ever were a time when the saint had seeming reason—real reason there never can be—to doubt the love of God to him, that season would be when all goes smoothly with him, when he is a stranger to sorrows of the soul, and when the pathway of Providence is pre-eminently soft to the feet, and grateful to the senses, because of the beautiful and fragrant flowers by which it

is strewed on either side. Then, if ever, would be the time to ask the question, whether God hath not forgotten to be gracious? When He chastises His people, it is not for His own pleasure, but for their profit. Everywhere this is impressively brought out in the Bible. "He doth not," we are expressly told in the Lamentations, the third chapter and thirty-third verse, "willingly afflict the children of men." It is as a father that He visits His people with the rod; and we all know what a fulness of affection towards his own offspring there is in a father's heart. It is, indeed, because He loves them so well, because He feels towards them so tender an affection, that He visits them with stripes. But in His heaviest strokes there is not a particle of displeasure—not a drop of wrath—in the cup of sorrow which the believer has to drink. That cup is the fruit of a Father's affection: it is all meant for purposes of correction.

On this subject there is a most glorious explicitness and fulness in both divisions of the inspired volume. Though the Fatherly character of God was but comparatively little realised or even discerned in the Old Testament dispensa-

tion, but was reserved in all its gracious fulness for the gospel,—yet in some of the earlier books of the Bible we have the great truth brought out in a way which none should have failed to perceive. “As a man,” or a father, says Moses, in the fifth verse of the eighth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, formerly quoted, “chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee.” An affectionate father—and such only is here meant—never inflicts pain in any form on the child he loves, without great reluctance. It causes his heart a pang to visit his son with the rod. He can only bring himself to do it, because he feels and knows that it is necessary to the welfare of his offspring that it should be done. It is because he loves his son that he applies the rod to him. And his affection prevents the infliction of a greater amount of punishment than the occasion requires. Timely correction prevents the ruin of the child, and therefore the parental hand applies the rod. It is the same with God. He visits His people with troubles and trials in every variety of form, that He may prevent their rushing recklessly on their eternal ruin. Job, in the fifth chapter and seventeenth

and eighteenth verses of his book, is very explicit to the same effect. "Happy," says he, "is the man whom God correcteth; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: for he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole." And of all the saints with whose names we are made acquainted in the Old Testament, there is none speaks more with the voice of authority on this subject than Job, for never did man before or since his time, so far as we know, experience more heavily or continuously the afflicting hand of God. David, too, comes forward in many of his precious Psalms to bear his testimony, from his own personal experience, to the great truth, that to be afflicted is a proof of the Divine affection, and the most blessed thing which can befall a believer. "Blessed," he says, in the ninety-fourth Psalm and the twelfth verse, "is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord." Other proofs of what David felt on this subject will be given, when I come to speak of the personal experience of God's people in reference to the deep providential waters through which they are so often called to pass. Solomon also sets his seal to the blessed-

ness of receiving fatherly correction from the hand of God. He says, in the twelfth verse of the third chapter of his Proverbs,—“Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” The same idea is further illustrated in language the most expressive, in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, beginning at the sixth and ending with the eleventh verse,—“Whom the Lord loveth,” says Paul, “he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable

fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

But of all the portions of God's holy Word, in which His people are assured of His love to them in their seasons of sorrow, there is perhaps none which more forcibly or more fully sets forth that fact than the ninth verse of the sixty-third chapter of Isaiah. “In all their afflictions,” says the prophet, “he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.” What marvellous love! Who shall fully sound its depths? No one. They are unfathomable. There is something which oppresses the mind in its attempts to grasp the great fact, that God should, in a sense, be afflicted in all the afflictions of His saints. What a rich source of consolation, what an inexhaustible fountain of joy and support, ought this idea to afford to the suffering saints of God! He could not give a greater proof of the tenderness of the love which He bears to His people than is done in the verse in question.

Paul, in the eleventh chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, and the thirty-second verse, expresses the truth on which we are dwelling, when he says,—“But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” And the same idea is beautifully brought out in the sixteenth and seventeenth verses of the fourth chapter in his second Epistle to the saints at Corinth,—“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” And, last of all, as bearing on this aspect of our subject, there is that most precious declaration in the third chapter of Revelation and nineteenth verse,—“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” To be chastened by God is to His people a conclusive proof of the affection which He bears to them. What saint, then, would be without chastisement from his heavenly Father's hand? He who is not rebuked and chastened by God, has great grounds to fear lest he should not be a child of God.

At this part of our present chapter a few general observations, by way of parenthesis, may be useful. When the Christian is in deep distress he especially requires, not only the rich consolations of the gospel to sustain him under his trials, but stands in imminent need of the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, that he may not act in a manner at variance with the Divine will. The afflicted believer is in danger of falling into two errors. He may either be sinfully impatient under his troubles, and consequently unduly anxious to be delivered from them, or he may seek their continuance. The latter, it is true, is a very rare circumstance, in the experience of believers, but still it has occurred, as will be hereafter shewn. The former state of feeling is very common. It is almost universal. The saints of God, even when they are eminent for their spirituality of mind and the holiness of their conversation, are all more or less frequently conscious of impatience under their trials, and of an undue earnestness in their prayers for deliverance from them. Now, this is not in consonance with the will or the Word of God. There is no authority in Scripture for absolute or uncondi-

tional prayer for deliverance from trials. You have God's permission to pray for deliverance from sorrows, but it must be in subordination to His good pleasure. You are to qualify your petitions by the words, and by the feelings which those words express,—“If it be agreeable to Thy will, O God.” The memorable prayer of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane ought to be regarded by all believers as the model in this respect. “Father,” He said, “if it be possible,”—if it be consistent with thy good pleasure,—“let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.”

But though the Christian has thus no authority for praying absolutely for deliverance from his troubles, he has the warrant of the Divine Word for praying, without any condition or qualification whatever, for God's gracious support under his trials, and for the deep sanctification of them. It is, indeed, especially for the latter purpose that God visits His people with afflictions; and when their minds are fully enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and their hearts are rightly exercised by Divine grace, they will pray for resignation under the correcting hand of their heavenly Father, and

for the sanctified use of all the afflictions which He sees fit to send them. Let me entreat you; therefore, Christian reader, to lay this consideration deeply to heart, in your seasons of sorrow,—that were God to hear your prayers for unconditional deliverance from your troubles, prompted by a spirit of impatience and fretfulness, it would be the greatest calamity which could befall you. He never gives, and never can give, a greater proof of the exquisite tenderness of His love towards His people, than in not answering those prayers, which, in their ignorance and sinful restiveness under His afflicting hand, they often offer up to Him. I do not know whether it ever has occurred to others, but it has often occurred to my own mind,—that it is a matter which admits of doubt, whether God does not often as signally display the greatness of His love for His people in not hearing their prayers, as by listening to them, and granting what they ask,—in what He withholds from them, as in what He bestows upon them. There is not a man of deep Christian experience who cannot look back on periods of his life in which, had God granted him the desires of his heart, the result would have been his ruin.

What a mercy to know this, and what a manifestation of the Divine love is furnished in God's withholding oftentimes from us the very things on which we had most intently set our hearts! May the thought teach every believer in Christ what abundant cause he has to be grateful to God, that he is not, in this respect, in his own hands, but in the hands of his infinitely wise and infinitely loving Father in heaven.

But I have said that, while the great sin of the vast majority of believers is to be impatient, and even to give expression to murmuring thoughts, because of God's providential dealings with them, there are some Christians who have derived so much and such sensible benefit from their afflictions, as to pray that God would visit them with further afflictions. John Bunyan sometimes prayed that new afflictions might be sent to him, in order that he might become increasingly humble, and be more effectually weaned from the world. This was wrong on the part of Bunyan, as it would be on the part of any Christian of the present day. There is no authority, nor the shadow of authority, for such a prayer in the inspired volume. It is a practical

arraignment of the Divine wisdom and goodness. God is intelligent enough—for He is omniscient, to know what amount of affliction is needful for us, and He will give us just that amount and no more. And as He does not put one drop more than is absolutely necessary into our cup of sorrow, so the same love which prompted Him to withhold His hand when He had done all that was needed, will prevent His withholding from us any one additional trouble which we may require, or restrain Him from giving increased power to those afflictions which we are already enduring. Our duty in such a case is simply to lie passive, with childlike simplicity, in the hands of God, assured that, if we are His, He will do for us whatever will prove in the end most conducive to our good, and most strikingly exemplify the great love wherewith He hath loved us. Great grace is needful for this; but God is infinitely gracious, and will, in answer to believing prayer, impart to us all the grace which the occasion may require.

But God no less displays His love to His people in their times of trouble, by the support which He vouchsafes to them, and the assurance

He gives them, that they will be ultimately delivered out of the deep waters through which He causes them for a season to pass. With regard to the strength which God imparts to His people to bear up under their troubles, and the comfort which He administers to them, Job, in the seventeenth and eighteenth verses of the fifth chapter of his book, makes use of remarkable words expressive of his views on the subject. These we have already quoted, and will have occasion to quote them in another part of this chapter. The passage shews, that if God lays one hand heavily on His saints, He graciously supports them with the other. The Psalmist gives forcible and explicit expression to this truth in the ninth verse of his ninth Psalm, when he says,—“The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” David had a sweet consciousness of the gracious upholding presence of God in all his sorrows, when he said, in the fifth verse of his twenty-seventh Psalm,—“In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me on a rock.” The words admit of two constructions,—either God will avert from His

saints the troubles which befall others, or, if they are overtaken with calamities of any kind or in any form, national or individual, they will find in their heavenly Father protection and strength, until the calamities be overpast. The same soul-comforting truth is brought out in the seventh verse of the thirty-fourth of his songs,—the sweetest by far that ever greeted the ear of mortal man,—songs, moreover, whose melodious notes cause inexpressible delight, as they break on the ears of the seraphim and cherubim in heaven. “The angel of the Lord encompasseth round about those that fear him, and delivereth them.” If God’s angels do not prevent the trouble, they will minister comfort and impart strength under its pressure. Very precious to many afflicted saints of God have been those two other short sentences of the Psalmist, previously quoted, wherein he says that God keepeth all His people’s bones, so that not one of them shall be broken; and that He maketh all their beds in their sickness.

Hear, also, from the lips of the man according to God’s own heart, another emphatic utterance on the same subject. It is presented to us, first,

in the form of an injunction, and then in the shape of a promise,—“Cast thy burden on the Lord.” Blessed injunction! “And he shall sustain thee.” Precious promise! But as if the promise were not sufficient, or rather with the view of giving it greater strength, it is added,—“For he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” The words of the Apostle are remarkably similar in substance, nor is there much diversity between the two verses in the phraseology,—“Cast all your cares on God, for he careth for you.” David gives a very express and very emphatic assurance of the presence and power of God amidst all the troubles of His people, when he says, in the fourteenth verse of his hundred and forty-fifth Psalm,—“The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all that are bowed down.” To the same effect is the declaration of David in the third verse of the hundred and forty-seventh Psalm, so recently quoted,—“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”

In all the books of the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, there are more or less frequent intimations of the affection which God feels for His people in their sorrows, and of the support which He is ever ready to render them in their

days of distress. A few only can be given. Hear the words which, through the mouth of the evangelical prophet, he addressed to Jerusalem of old, in her seasons of sorrow,—“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God,” is the language of Isaiah, in his fortieth chapter and the first verse. “Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem,” he says in the second verse, “and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” And in the twenty-ninth verse of the same chapter, the prophet tells us that “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.” In the following chapter, in the tenth verse, a verse quoted for another purpose in a previous chapter, God addressing His people, says,—“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

And in the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth verses of the same chapter, there is a full unfolding of the same sympathy which God feels in the afflictions of His saints, and of

the support and solace which He affords to them, in their seasons of emergency. "When," Isaiah says, "the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah-tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together; that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it."

One more quotation from the evangelical prophet is all I shall give in illustration of the truth, that God is ever present with His people in their afflictions, to solace and support them. Thousands of believers have felt, in their soul's sweet experience, the blessedness of the promise, so beautifully amplified. "When," says God, in the second and third verses of the forty-third chapter, "thou passest through the waters, I

will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.”

In the ninth verse of the thirteenth chapter of Zechariah, God makes very plain to His people the merciful purposes for which He visits them with affliction, but He no less explicitly assures them that He will hear their prayers for the needful strength and comfort under them, and then for deliverance from them. “I will,” He says, “bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried : they shall call on my name, and I will hear them : I will say, It is my people ; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.”

In the New Testament, especially in the Epistles, the same truth receives repeated confirmation and striking illustration. Paul, in the third verse of the fifth chapter to the Romans, could say not only for himself, but for all his fellow-saints, that they gloried in tribulations.

And why? Because they felt and had found in their sweet experience that God had abundantly strengthened them, and accomplished purposes of the greatest mercy by their trials; for he adds, that they knew that tribulation wrought patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: a hope that did not make ashamed; because the love of God was shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, which was given unto them. Paul saw with a remarkable clearness of spiritual vision what it has, all through this part of my subject, been my earnest endeavour to impress on the minds of believers,—that God does especially and emphatically display the greatness of His love to His people, when they are in the furnace of affliction.

There is another delightful passage from the Apostle of the Gentiles, very similar in purport to that which has just been quoted, in the second, third, fourth, and fifth verses of the first chapter of his second Epistle to the Corinthians,—“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of

all comfort ; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.”

As the sufferings of the saints abound, their consolations not only correspondingly abound, but even superabound ; in other words, the consolation far transcends the sorrow, as great multitudes of God’s people have found in their blessed experience. Not less explicit with regard to the support which God gives, and the comfort He ministers to His people in their days of deep distress, is that other passage of the same Apostle, in the same Epistle, which will be found in the seventeenth and eighteenth verses of the fourth chapter,—“For,” says he, “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

In further portions of the Divine Word, which

conduct to the same conclusion, I shall have occasion to refer when I come to speak of the acknowledgments of the support and comfort from on high, which so many of God's saints have made, as having been experienced by them in particular periods of their lives, when, to their own apprehension, as well as in the eyes of others, all God's waves and billows were going over them.

In the meantime, let me briefly allude to the exhibition of God's love made to His saints in their seasons of sorrow, by the assurance which is given them in His Word, that they will ultimately be delivered out of all their troubles. But a word or two in addition to what has been said, in a previous part of this chapter, by way of explanation, is necessary first. Some of God's promises of deliverance to His people are understood by them as if those promises were made in absolute terms, and as if they constituted an assurance of certain and immediate deliverance from every trouble. This is, as we before in effect observed, to mistake the meaning of God's Word. The Divine promise is absolute as regards the ultimate deliverance of the saints

from their sorrows. As surely as their God and Father exists, so surely will they in the end emerge from the waters of affliction into which they have been plunged. This final and complete deliverance, however, will not be accomplished in their blessed experience until they have been translated from earth to heaven.

But there is another sense in which God's promises to deliver His people from all their troubles are to be understood. I allude to the fact that, either they are so abundantly strengthened and comforted in their afflictions, by the bestowment of grace from God, as to divest their providential dispensations of that which makes them most grievous and unbearable to others; or, their prayers are heard for deliverance; whereas those who never resort to the throne of grace are suffered to lie longer under their heavy burdens.

With this preliminary word of explanation, let me now, for the comfort of God's saints, glance for a moment or two at a few of those portions of Scripture in which the Divine love is displayed by promises of deliverance from trouble. No man ever knew so largely what troubles are as the patriarch Job, and yet he said that in six

troubles, yea, in seven—that is, in all troubles—God would deliver His saints. The Psalmist, in the thirty-fourth of his songs of praise and the seventeenth verse, speaks in magnified terms of the deliverance which God maketh for His saints,—“The righteous,” he remarks, “cry, and the Lord delivereth them out of all their troubles.” And in the next verse but one, the man according to God’s own heart says,—“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.” “God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble,” says David, in the first verse of the forty-sixth Psalm. In the fiftieth Psalm and the fifteenth verse, God graciously says to all His afflicted ones,—“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” Very similar in substance, and not unlike in the language, is the gracious assurance which God gives His saints in their times of trouble, in the fifteenth and sixteenth verses of the ninety-first of David’s songs,—“He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.”

Then there is a beautiful passage in the first four verses of the hundred and third Psalm,—“Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies.”

But the most remarkable illustration given by the man according to God's own heart, of our heavenly Father's presence in times of trouble, and of a Divine deliverance of the saints from their sorrows, is to be found in the hundred and seventh of his Psalms. That is one of the longest of his songs of praise, and the theme which pervades it, in a manner more or less marked throughout, is the deliverance which God works for His people. On no fewer than four occasions in that beautiful Psalm does he employ the words,—“Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.” And so overpowered was he with a sense of what the saints owe to God for His gracious deliverances in the day of trouble, that again and again he

exclaims, with an emphasis which, after the lapse of four thousand years, seems to have lost none of its strength, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" And, addressing God in the seventh verse of the hundred and thirty-eighth Psalm, he says,—“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.”

But I must not further extend my quotations from the Old Testament, and a very few from the New must suffice. The thirteenth verse of the tenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians is full of consolation to the saints, as expressly assuring them that from every temptation in trouble a way of escape will be provided for them,—“There hath no temptation,” says Paul, “happened to you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” No less profoundly was Paul impressed with the conviction that God

would deliver him out of all his troubles, when, in the eighteenth verse of the fourth chapter of his second Epistle to Timothy, he says,—“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom : to whom be glory for ever and ever.”

Other passages to the same effect might have been quoted, but these will suffice. Is there not, then, a clear and conclusive proof to be found of the fact, that God displays His love to His people, in and by their afflictions, when He strengthens them to bear them, comforts them in them, and sooner or later brings them triumphantly out of them ?

But this most precious truth may be more deeply and permanently impressed on the minds of some of God's people, if we bring before them a few of those manifold assurances with which the Bible abounds, that the sorrows and sufferings of God's saints will be succeeded by joys and bliss which will more than compensate for the afflictions with which God has seen meet to visit them. God says, in some sense, if not always in the same sense as He did to Hezekiah, as recorded in the fifth verse of the twentieth

chapter of the second book of Kings,—“I have seen thy tears, I have heard thy prayers: behold, I will heal thee.” What an abundant source of consolation there ought to be in this, to God’s sorrowing saints! He sees their tears. The tears of contrition and of affection are precious in God’s sight, and powerful with Him in prayer. Those who know not God can have no sympathy with the spiritual sorrows of His people, and cannot enter into their spiritual circumstances. The world looks with pity and contempt on the tears of the saints, and regards those who shed them as poor unhappy fanatics. But God’s estimate is very different. He sees their tears—in other words, is affected by them. So precious, indeed, are they in His esteem, that He puts them into His bottle, in order that they may not be lost, nor be ever out of His sight. How forcibly does the Psalmist’s idea of God putting the tears of His sorrowing saints into His bottle, bring before the mind the tenderness of the Divine affection, when believers are passing through their deep waters! The more we meditate on the words, the more they are seen to abound with a blessedness which far transcends

all our conceptions of their import, when they are first brought under our consideration.

In the Psalms there are various assurances of the most explicit and emphatic kind, that the afflictions of God's people will be succeeded by joy and bliss in His own good time and way. "Weeping," we are told in the fifth verse of the thirtieth Psalm, "may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." And in the fifth verse of the hundred and twenty-sixth of the same sweet songs of David, we have the assurance that they that sow in tears shall reap in joy. "He that goeth forth," it is added in the following verse, "and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

The prophecies of Isaiah are exceedingly rich in promises to the people of God, not only as with reference to their deliverance from their troubles, but to the happiness which shall follow their having passed through the furnace. Though the language be figurative, there is a delightful passage, formerly given, to this effect, in the seventeenth to the twentieth verses of the forty-first chapter,—“When the poor and needy seek

water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah-tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together; that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it." No one can read this passage of Scripture without at once perceiving that it has a spiritual signification as well as a literal meaning; and many a saint of God, understanding it in its higher and holier sense, has extracted from it unspeakable comfort to his soul. In the fifty-fourth chapter of the same prophet, and at the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth verses, the same sentiment is expressed,—“O thou afflicted,” says the prophet, “tossed with tempest, and not comforted! behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy win-

dows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." Very blessed to many a soul that had been submerged in the waters of deep distress, has that other passage proved which will be found in the first three verses of the sixty-first chapter of the same book,—"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called Trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." One more quotation is all for which we can find space from the pages of the evangelical prophet. It is that to be met with in the eighteenth and nineteenth verses of the sixty-fifth chapter,—

“But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.”

Let us now refer to one or two similar passages in Jeremiah. In the thirty-first chapter of his prophecies, and the twelfth verse, God says of His afflicted people, “that their soul shall be as a watered garden, and that they shall not sorrow any more.” And in the next verse, still speaking in His own person, He adds, “I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.”

Omitting the numerous portions of the Divine Word which might be quoted from the New Testament, illustrative of the truth that we are seeking to establish—passages which we the more readily omit, because they are familiar to every Christian mind—let us now glance at the proofs of the love of God to His people in their afflictions, which are furnished in the purposes for which their troubles are sent to them. The assurance has already been quoted of God's mer-

ciful object in visiting His saints with great and manifold troubles, which is given in the memorable words,—that it is not for God’s pleasure but His people’s profit, that they are afflicted. But there are other parts of both Testaments in which that truth is brought out with a blessed force and fulness. Job had a clear perception of the advantages of sanctified afflictions when, in a verse before quoted, and which we need only now in part repeat, he said,—“Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth !” In the sixteenth verse of the twenty-sixth chapter of the Prophecies of Isaiah we meet with an illustration of the truth, that God overrules the afflictions of His people for their good. If He visits them with troubles, it is that they may return—we say it with all reverence—the visit that He has paid to them. He visits them in providence, and they visit Him in prayer. “Lord,” says the prophet, “in trouble have they visited thee : they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.” That is a merciful visitation ; that is a clear token of the love which God cherishes towards His saints, when His chastisements have the effect of leading the tried and troubled believer to the throne of

grace. Be assured, all ye saints into whose hands this work may come, that the greatest personal manifestations of God's mercy, the most unmistakable tokens of His love you ever received from His hands, were those particular visitations of His providence which drove you the soonest and most unreservedly to the throne of the heavenly grace. All such dispensations of Divine Providence invariably prove eminently conducive to the spiritual benefit of those who are exercised hereby.

There is another delightful development of the truth, that God displays His love to His people in their seasons of sorrow, by converting their troubles into great blessings, in the tenth verse of the forty-eighth chapter of the same book,—“Behold, I have refined thee,” says Isaiah, “but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.” There are two constructions of which this passage will admit. God has chosen many of His people in the furnace of affliction, in reference to their conversion. They have been made, when on a bed of sickness, or when overwhelmed with sorrows, springing from the loss of friends or of property, or from some other calamity—to see their sins for the first time in

their lives, and they have fled at once, by faith, to the cross of Christ. But this is not the primary signification of the words. They mainly mean that God often makes use of the afflictions which befall His people, as the occasions of their deep sanctification, and the consequent clear and conclusive manifestation, to their own minds, of the fact of their being His people. Many a saint of God can, from his own blessed experience, set his seal to the soundness of this view of the primary meaning of the verse.

But instead of quoting further portions of the inspired volume in illustration of this aspect of the afflictions of God's people, let us look a little at what their individual experience has been in relation to the troubles and trials through which they have had to pass, and then it will be seen in the clearest manner, that God has eminently, and in a way never to be forgotten, shewn His love to His saints in their seasons of sorrow, and brought the great truth home with irresistible force to their minds, — that He does choose them, or specially manifest His electing love to them, in the furnace of affliction.

As this volume has already extended much be-

yond the dimensions which were originally contemplated, it will be necessary only to bring before our readers a few out of the many illustrations of this aspect of our subject, which everywhere meet the eye as it glances over the pages of inspiration. Many a saint has been strengthened by the implicit confidence which Job reposed in God, when the afflicted patriarch said, at the very moment that he seemed to human eye all but overwhelmed with sorrow,—“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” Probably no more remarkable expression of trust in God is to be found in the Scriptures. Even if regarded purely in an intellectual light, there is something surpassingly forcible and felicitous in it. Only try to realise what must have been the greatness of Job's trust in God, what the strength of His confidence in Him, when he could say, that even after having been slain by God, he would still trust in Him. Nothing but the most vivid perception of his heavenly Father's affection, made to him in his troubles, could have inspired the love to, and trust in, God, which the sublime expression implies. Again, when speaking from his own experience, in that passage in the seventeenth and

eighteenth verses of his fifth chapter, which we transferred to our pages in a previous part of this chapter, he says,—“Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth ; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty : for he maketh sore, and bindeth up ; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.”

No one could ever have expressed himself in language like this, who did not speak from his own personal experience of the blessedness of sanctified affliction. And there is not a child of God who may chance to read these pages, if, spiritually speaking, clothed and in his right mind, that will not adopt and indorse the words of the most afflicted man of whom we read in the volume of inspiration. David has borne abundant testimony to the blessedness and benefit of afflictions. “Blessed is the man,” he says, in the twelfth verse of his ninety-fourth Psalm, clearly speaking from his own experience, “whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law.” And in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm there are numerous acknowledgments of the love and mercy which God displays to His children in their seasons of trial, and of the benefit they derive from

the chastisements which they receive from their heavenly Father. "Before," he says, in the sixty-seventh verse,—“before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now,” or since then, “I have kept thy word.” Very similar language is made use of by David in the seventy-first verse,—“It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” And in the seventy-fifth verse, formerly quoted, he says,—“I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.” Paul even went so far, speaking from his experience of the happiness of sanctified affliction, as to “glory in tribulation.” And he assigns the reason,—“Knowing that tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, hope.” His testimony on this point will be found in the third verse of the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. In the seventeenth verse of the fourth chapter of his second Epistle to the Corinthians he speaks to the same effect, in even yet more emphatic language. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” And in referring, in the nineteenth verse of the first chapter of his letter to the Philippians, to a

specific trial, he says,—“I *know*”—observe the confidence and certainty with which he speaks—“I *know* that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” I will not again quote what he says in the twelfth chapter of the Hebrews,—that God’s chastenings are proofs, not only of His affection, but of His saints’ sonship. But what is said by the chiefest of the apostles, in the tenth and eleventh verses, bears so blessedly on the point on which we are dwelling, that it cannot be too deeply impressed on the believer’s mind,—“God,” he says, chastens us “not for his pleasure, but for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.” Partakers of God’s holiness, partakers of the Divine nature. And if that be the object, and not only the object but the effect, of the application of the rod to us, what child of God will not only cheerfully bear the rod, but embrace it, and adore and praise the Fatherly hand that lays it on? We are told, in the next verse, that no affliction “seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” And this he said from his

own experience ; for he had been often and deeply “exercised thereby.” James, too, in his first chapter and the twelfth verse, bears his testimony to the blessedness which the believer derives from the sorrows of his soul,—“Blessed,” says he, “is the man that endureth temptation,” or trials, or troubles in any form : “for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” And, to quote only one passage more, Peter, in the seventh verse of the first chapter of his first Epistle, says, doubtless speaking of the other Christians’ trials from his own,—“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearance of Jesus Christ.”

We have thus referred to some of the many passages with which the oracles of God are crowded, relative to the blessedness and benefit of sanctified afflictions. And surely if God does overrule all the trials and troubles of His people in so signal a manner for their good, it cannot be necessary to add another word in confirmation or illustration of the truth, which we have endea-

voured to impress deeply on the minds and hearts of all believers,—that God eminently and especially displays His love to His saints in their seasons of sorrow.

It is now time we should draw this chapter to a conclusion ; but before doing so, let us make a few observations, of a general nature, respecting the afflictions of God's people—in some cases reiterating, for the purpose of more deeply impressing, what we have said before—regarded as proofs of their heavenly Father's love. We do this in the hope that they may be found at once profitable and comforting to their souls.

We have adverted to a variety of instances of another kind from that we are about to adduce, in which the saints of God have been sensibly blessed amidst the greatest trials. Daniel was happy, as well as safe, in the lions' den ; so were the three children of God in the fiery furnace. Paul and Silas sang songs in the night in prison, when their feet were in the stocks. And in the prospect of imprisonment, torments, and a violent death, at a subsequent period of Paul's history, he could calmly and consequently say,—“None of these things move me.” Others of God's most

eminent people, in more recent periods of the history of the Church, have derived such sensible comfort and sanctification from afflictions, that they have left it on record, that the happiest hours they ever spent on earth, were those in which they were lying helpless, so far as human aid was concerned, in the furnace of affliction. Bunyan, Rutherford, Brainerd, Jephson, and thousands of other saints of God, distinguished from their fellow Christians by their surpassing spirituality of mind, have all set their seals to the inexpressible blessedness of passing through deep waters. Some, indeed, have even gone so far as to express their regret that their troubles were not of longer continuance. This was very wrong, just as we remarked in the beginning of this chapter; it is sinful to ask God that He would be pleased to send us afflictions. It is, in effect, as we have said before, to arraign the wisdom of God. It is tantamount to saying that we are wiser than Him, and know better than He does what is most for our good. It is right to lie passive in the hands of our heavenly Father, when He sends us troubles, and not to feel impatient for recovery,—just as it is right and most

commendable to welcome afflictions when they come; but to dictate to God when He should visit us with the rod, or to ask Him to give us a greater number of strokes than He intended, is a sin on the part of His saints of a very aggravated nature. If God were to hear our prayers, either for providential visitations of an afflictive kind, or for our continuance in the fiery furnace, He would but answer us according to our folly, and no blessing whatever, but the reverse, would be derived by us from such visitations. The afflictions which God himself sends, He will bless to His people, and none other. We have no right to make crosses for ourselves.

All the troubles which come to us in the dispensations of God's providence, will most surely, if we are His people, turn out for our advantage; and, for their sanctified use, as before observed, we are not only permitted, but enjoined to pray; but we have no warrant to pray for the sanctification of any troubles which we make to ourselves, nor to expect the Divine support under them. Beware, believer, then, of making crosses to yourself. Be content with those which God makes for you; and anxiously seek, by prayer

and by submission to your Father's will, to obtain the sanctified use of all which He has, in love and mercy, sent to you. And this you will, sooner or later, assuredly obtain. You will most probably be sensibly blessed during your affliction, by having more vivid views than before of the love of God, and clearer perceptions of His infinite wisdom in putting you into the fiery furnace. And that will bring you into closer and more frequent communion with Him. It will lay, as it were, His very heart, in all its loving nature, bare before you. But should this not prove the case in your seasons of sorrow, the blessing will come afterwards. It will not be lost. It will only be deferred for a little—deferred, believer, until the very time when you shall most stand in need of it. It may be withheld, in order that it may come with greater power and sweetness, when that trouble has passed away only to be succeeded by another and a greater. Or it may be deferred until the time that you shall have to pass through the dark valley and the shadow of death,—deferred, I mean, as regards its sensible enjoyment; for it is very important for the people of God never to

lose sight of the great and gracious truth,—that they often receive blessings of infinite and eternal importance, though unconscious of the fact at the moment, and, it may be, for a long time afterwards. I feel assured that there is not a servant of God who reads these pages, who cannot look back on the past providential dealings with him, of His Father in heaven, and say, that not only does he now see a boundless blessedness in many a trouble which God laid upon him, though he could not discern the Divine love in it at the time,—but that even those afflictions which he regarded when enduring them, as indications that God was dealing unkindly with him, are now felt by him to have been pre-eminent among all the things which have wrought together for his good.

But even should there be some instances—and if there be any such, they are exceedingly rare—in which the believer in Jesus may not in this world be able to trace any sensible benefit to particular dispensations of God's providence, he will, in the sanctuary above, most clearly see it, rejoice in it, and praise and adore God for it, without one moment's intermission through all eternity. Just as the saints will then see that

not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord had promised, so they will, with a brightness of vision not less great, discern the glorious truth, that God did overrule every affliction which He sent to them when on earth, for their especial good. Nor will this be all that the saints in glory will learn of God's dealings with them in providence. They will then learn the special benefit they so derived—its amount, and the mode in which it was received by them. They will then also wonder that they should at the time not only have failed to hear the rod and Him who had appointed it, but even in the utterances of their ignorance and unbelief have said,—“All these things are against me.” It will then be seen—and God will receive from the redeemed ascriptions of eternal glory for it—that not only were afflictions indispensable alike to their safety and sanctity at the time they were sent, but that they were not one whit too severe. They were just severe enough, and no more, to answer the ends which God intended to accomplish by them. It cannot be too often repeated that our heavenly Father never puts one atom more to the weight of His people's afflictions

than is absolutely needful. This is a truth which is often brought home with resistless power to the mind of the believer on earth: it will be most clearly seen and thankfully acknowledged in heaven. And so, too, with the nature of the afflictions which God sends to His saints. They are just—it cannot be too frequently reiterated—the very trials and troubles that were wanted. It would not be right to say that no other kind of providential dispensation would have accomplished God's merciful purposes in visiting His people with the rod. That would be to limit the Holy One of Israel; but His infinite wisdom, blended with His boundless love, is a sufficient guarantee, that the particular visitation was the wisest and the best. If the affliction was heavy, it was not heavier than he who was the subject of it was able to bear; for God invariably, in the experience of all His people, when passing through their deep waters, fulfils His gracious promises to them,—“My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.” “As thy day is, so thy strength shall be.”

But it is not necessary to dwell at greater

length on this point. I trust that enough has been said to satisfy the saints of God that all His providential dealings with them are prompted by infinite love, under the guidance of infinite wisdom. It is easy to discern the hand of God in every affliction which befalls His people; but it is my earnest desire that they should no less clearly see in it the loving *heart* of their heavenly Father. It is only when faith makes this discovery, that the believer can rejoice in tribulation, and say, in reference to the most painful and trying scenes through which he has to pass in his pathway to the eternal world,—“He hath done all things well.”

In connexion with the afflictions, whether bodily or mental, whether secular or spiritual, which the people of God have to endure in their present probationary state, it is of importance to advert for a moment to a feeling which is not only exceedingly sinful, but is more or less frequently experienced by all believers. I allude to their imagining that there is a peculiar something in their cup of sorrow which makes it more difficult for them cheerfully to drink, than that which God puts into the hands of their

fellow-saints. They imagine, in other words, that God is somewhat harder in His dealings with them than with others of His people; and that, if they were tried or afflicted in the same way as others, they could bear their tribulations with greater cheerfulness and resignation. This is all a mistake. If you, believer, were to have your own way, and were permitted by God to exchange troubles with your fellow-saints, you would soon find that your new trials were as hard to bear as those for which they had been substituted. Probably I ought to go further. You might find them even harder to bear, and wish to have your old ones back in their stead. Though it may never have occurred to you, it is not on that account less true, that your fellow-believers may, in many cases, fancy that your burthens are lighter than theirs, and would willingly have yours transferred to them, on condition that theirs could be transferred to you. Be assured of this, that not only does God manifest His love to you by sending you afflictions, but that He does no less display the favour He has to you, by the very form or manner in which He sends them. Do you know that in saying, in

your own minds,—“Any other trouble, Lord, but the one under which I am groaning,” you are arraigning the wisdom of God? You are practically saying that you are wiser than Him. You would not, I am aware, do this knowingly; but you are doing it in effect, when you wish, that since afflictions must really be your portion, they had been sent to you in some other shape than that in which they have come. God knows best not only at what particular time, but in what particular form, your trial ought to come. Let this consideration teach you to render a ready and cheerful acquiescence in all the appointments of God, whether they relate to things temporal or spiritual. Leave all in the hands of your heavenly Father, and bless and praise His name that they are in His hands, not in your own. If you had the selection, be assured of this, you would not make the right one. You would choose such troubles as would fail to accomplish those gracious purposes which God has in view in all His providential dealings with His people. The afflictions which He sends are not only intended, but they are unerringly adapted to bring to pass those merciful purposes towards

you which He has in His heart. And we repeat, with all reverence, what we have before said, that were your troubles to come in some other shape than that in which they are sent, they would not so well or so speedily, if at all, work in you those gracious purposes which God has in contemplation by them. Each trouble has some special object in view, though you may not be able to discern it at the moment. It is sent to strike at the root of some secret or cherished sin which might remain unaffected by any other form of affliction. Has God suddenly deprived you of worldly riches? then you may be sure that your heart, though you may not have been conscious of the fact, has been unduly set on the treasures of earth. Do you mourn over the loss of some beloved parent or child, or sister or brother, or other relative or friend, dear to you as your own soul, then depend on it, that such earthly relative or friend has been *too* dear to you,—been cherished so fondly by you as to occupy, in a greater or less measure, that place in your affections, which God alone wishes to possess, and to the possession of which He alone has the right. And could your heavenly Father

furnish you with a greater proof of the fervency of His affection for you, than He does in thus desiring, and, let us add, determining by the dispensations of His providence, that He will occupy the supreme place in your hearts? How amazing the thought, that such a God as ours is, could thus set so high a value—even, if we may so speak, an infinite value—on the love, not only of worms of the dust, but of daring rebels against His government! Meditate, believer, on that wondrous fact. And, discerning clearly by the teaching of God's Word and Spirit, that all the sorrows which He sends you in your present state of being, are solely intended as a course of discipline by which you may be brought closer to Himself, and thereby be made happy in this world, as well as sure of eternal happiness in the world to come,—welcome every trial, be thankful for every affliction. Regard all as fresh tokens of God's goodness, as renewed manifestations of the unfathomable depths of affection there are in His heart towards you. And never for one moment let the suggestions of Satan so far prevail as to awaken a doubt in your minds, that the particular troubles you are called to pass through,

are just the troubles you needed. It will greatly tend to sweeten your future afflictions, to feel a thorough conviction of this truth,—that, whatever they may be, they seemed to infinite Wisdom, guided by infinite Love, absolutely necessary to accomplish His gracious purposes in you, and through you, and for you. And thus, alike with respect to your present state of being, and that state which will succeed when you have been summoned from earth to those celestial regions which eye hath not seen, and in which there are such manifestations of God's goodness and glory as have never entered into the heart of man to conceive,—you will feel an ever-deepening conviction, that, both as regards His name and His nature—“GOD IS LOVE.”

CHAPTER XII.

GOD'S LOVE TO HIS PEOPLE IN DEATH AND IN THE WORLD TO COME.

WE have thus endeavoured to trace the infinite love which God bears to His saints, from its commencement in eternity—if that can be said to have a commencement which is eternal—through all its various and marked manifestations in time. We have shewn that God regards His people with the same boundless, unvarying affection at every stage and step of their journey through life. It now remains for us to bring before the people of God a few of the many proofs with which the Scriptures abound, that He loves them in death, and will love them throughout the never-ending ages of that world which is to come.

That God loves His people in death as He did in life, is a truth of which there are clear and

conclusive proofs in every part of both divisions of the Bible. But were there no other assurances of this within the compass of Divine revelation than that which is furnished by the Psalmist, when he says,—“Precious in God’s sight is the death of his saints,”—that is so striking and so ample in its import, that it ought to be sufficient. The world can only see something great or interesting in the death of those who have distinguished themselves by deeds which fill the mind with admiration. He who has lived a brilliant life in literature, in art, or in arms, dies, in the eyes of the mass of mankind, amidst a halo of glory. In mere spiritual excellence they can see nothing great, and consequently it is not to be expected that they should discern any glory in the death of the saints. Not so with God. While the most illustrious of our unregenerated race—speaking after the manner of men—are passing through the dark and narrow path which separates time from eternity, God sees nothing in them on which He can look with complacency. They have no worth in His view. They are not precious in His sight. But the death of His saints,—even the poorest, the humblest,

and most despised of their number,—is regarded by Him with an infinite interest. It is precious in His esteem beyond the power of the mind to conceive. It may happen that some very poor child of God, known to but few of his fellow-men, and treated with contempt as well as with neglect by those who do know him, may be led, in God's providence, to glance his eye over this, the concluding chapter of this volume. If so, let me say to him:—Though you may be unthought of and uncared for by your fellow-men, in death as you were in life, not having, it may be, any one to close the eyes which have lost their lustre, yet your death is precious in the sight of God. His eye rests on you in Christ Jesus, with an infinite complacency and delight. In His sight your death is more precious than the birth of unnumbered worlds.

In the thirteenth chapter and fourteenth verse of Hosea, God himself, speaking in His own name, gives a gracious assurance, by implication, of the manifestation as well as the existence of His love to His people in death. “I will,” He says, “ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O

death, I will be thy plague ; O grave, I will be thy destruction." This is said in reference to the death of God's saints ; and what saint can read the words, without seeing evidence of the clearest kind that God loves His people in death as well as in life ?

Very similar in substance is the well-known passage in the fifty-fifth, fifty-sixth, and fifty-seventh verses of the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, which Paul puts into the mouth of the believer in the contemplation of a dying hour,—“O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is God himself who, by abundant manifestations of His love, and by ample communications of His grace, thus disarms death of all his terrors to believers, and gives them the victory over the grave. It was from a clear apprehension, and a settled conviction of this truth, that David was enabled to look death in the face without the slightest feeling of dismay, and to give utterance to the beautiful language in his twenty-

third Psalm, which has, since his day, been adopted by millions of believers, and blessedly made their own,—“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and staff they comfort me.” Could God give a greater proof of His love to His people in the immediate prospect, or in the actual process of death, than in vouchsafing His gracious presence to them, and in comforting them with His rod and staff?

In his thirty-seventh Psalm and thirty-seventh verse, David calls on the world as well as on God's people, to witness the death of a saint,—“Mark the perfect man,” he says, “and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.” The saint is happy and peaceful in death, as he was in life, because in the one as well as in the other, he realises a sense of his heavenly Father's love. Often, indeed, the people of God are happier far in the article of death, than they ever were in life, because they know that all their trials and troubles are over, and that they are on the very eve of being received into the bosom of that gracious Being, who has so wondrously

displayed His love to them, and whom, in return, they have loved, since the days of their sensible adoption into His family, with a supreme affection.

What but a consciousness that he should be loved by God in death, as he had been in life, could have induced the good old Simeon to pray for his departure out of this world? “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” And how the heart of Paul must have heaved with joy, in the conviction that God would love him in death, when, in the verses already quoted, but which it is necessary here to repeat, he said,—“I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And the same Apostle, when he knew he was approaching his latter end, had so great a sense of the love of God to his soul, that he could, as recorded in the sixth, seventh, and eighth verses of the fourth chapter of his second Epistle to

Timothy, triumphantly say,—“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

And is not the same soul-sustaining and soul-sanctifying truth equally evident in that portion of the book of Revelation, where the solitary exile in the island of Patmos says,—“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” What but the love of God could make any intelligent being happy or blessed when about to be ushered into the eternal world? What but the sensible enjoyment of the love of God, at the time that heart and flesh are fainting and failing, could support and solace the spirit of the saint?

With regard to God's love in the state which follows death, the saints need not to have such proofs laid before them, as they require in regard to His love in the eternity that is past, or to His love in their life and death in this world.

And yet it may be well to glance, before closing the volume, at a few of those assurances and proofs, that God's love will be enjoyed by His people through all eternity, which are scattered in such rich profusion through the whole of the written Word.

The eternity of the believer's soul begins as soon as it has quitted the body. That moment it wings its flight to the God who gave it, and enters on a scene of bliss which shall be alike boundless and unending. The instant it reaches the realms of glory, it realises, in a measure, far transcending all thought, the consciousness of God's love which it enjoyed when a prisoner within its clay tenement on earth. Then the soul forms some conception of what the greatness of God's love is, from the happiness and glory which are its first celestial fruits. It was because of the clear apprehension of this truth which Paul had, that we hear of his longings to depart from this world, that he might be with Christ, which, as he well knew, was far better. Hence also the expression by the same Apostle,—“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” The same idea filled his mind

with holy delight when he said in the eighth verse of the fifth chapter of his second Epistle to the Corinthians,—“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” The Apostle John, too, had enraptured views of the happiness and glory of which the soul is made the participant immediately after death, when, in the thirteenth verse of the fourteenth chapter of his apocalyptic visions, he exclaimed,—“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”

But the felicity of the saints in heaven will not be perfect until after the resurrection,—when the soul, separated for a season from the body, shall be re-united to it,—not in the state in which the body formerly was when the soul was in alliance with it, but to the body in a glorified state. The bodies of the saints in heaven will be made like unto Christ's glorious body, and therefore, as would readily be conceived, even were Scripture silent on the subject, the resumption of the relationship on the part of the soul with a body so glorious, will contribute incalculably to the happiness of the just made perfect. And in producing that great and gracious result, the saints in glory will

have views of the love of God, compared with which their perceptions of the Father's love, when here, were unworthy of the name. No wonder that Paul, as he looked by the eye of faith within the veil, and had some glimmerings of what was in reversion for him there, said with a special emphasis,—“For the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” It was the same vision of a bright and blessed destiny in the world to come, which drew from him, in a verse already quoted, the well-known language,—“Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” That glory—the glory to be revealed—is depicted, in more or less vivid language, in almost every book in either of the two Testaments; but there is something transcendently sublime in the description given of the happiness of heaven, in the visions which John had, in his isolation from his species on the “isle called Patmos.” Unseen by human eye, and unheard by human ear, he there communed with his Maker, and enjoyed a nearness of access to God, and a fulness of revelation from Him,—such, perhaps,

as no other saint before or since his day has been privileged to possess. The glorified saints, he tells us, in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth verses of the seventh of his apocalyptic visions, "are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." There is something very remarkable and inconceivably blessed in the latter words. The same expression, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," occurs in the fourth verse of the twenty-first chapter. We need not say that—literally or strictly speaking—there will be no tears in heaven. The perfect, unchangeable, and eternal bliss, inseparable from the celestial regions, precludes the possibility of tears. If there could be tears in heaven, they would be tears of joy, of love, and of gratitude. If the eye ever could be moistened in the sanctuary above, it would be because the soul was

overpowered by a sense of the love, the goodness, and the grace of God. The expression, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," merely expresses—but what a wondrous force and felicity there is in the expression!—the infinite tenderness and condescension of God to His saints in glory. It gives such a view of His fatherly and overflowing affection for His people in their glorified state as ought to overpower the mind of every believer of the present day—just as it did that of John, by whom the bright and blessed vision of the happiness of God's people in the celestial city was seen, nearly two thousand years ago.

As stated in other parts of his apocalyptic book, John had other no less glorious visions of the bliss to be enjoyed by the saints in heaven, as the fruit of the love of their God and Father. In the twenty-first chapter and twenty-second and twenty-third verses, he says,—“I saw no temple therein : for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it ; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

And in the fifth verse of the twenty-second

chapter we are told,—“There shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

But why dwell on the manifestations of the Father's love to His people in heaven? When the pearly gates have once been passed, the glorified saints will never more doubt the love of God to them. It will not only be then seen in everything around them, but be realised, experienced, and felt within them, with a power of which we cannot at present form the slightest conception. Just only let the saint on earth try to picture to his own mind all that is involved in that one brief expression,—“God will be their glory.” The difficulty of the redeemed in heaven,—if the word difficulty could at all be applied with propriety to heaven,—will be, not as to their sense of God's love to them, but in believing that God ever could have so loved them as they will then find He has done. Every countenance—equally of angels as of men—will be radiant with an expression which will forcibly, though silently, proclaim the perfect consciousness which all enjoy of their being the objects of God's infi-

nite love. And every voice in that vast throng will be unceasingly engaged, so long as eternity shall last, in rendering ascriptions—coming from the lowest depths of every heart—of praise, and honour, and glory to God for the great love with which He loves His redeemed people. And these experiences and utterances, be it remembered, will not be deferred until some distant period in the annals of eternity. They will be contemporaneous with the saints' admittance to the mansions above. From the moment the curtain falls on them, as they make their exit from this world, and have been conducted to their place at the right hand of God,—from that moment they will begin to learn, in a way and to an extent they never did, or could have done on earth, what is included in the words of our title-page,—“GOD IS LOVE;” but when unnumbered ages have become a portion of the eternity that is past,—ages more numerous than the sands on the sea-shore,—they will still find that they are but beginning to enter into the import and blessedness of the wondrous words. They will be ever learning through all eternity, but will never be able to come to the full knowledge of what is

involved in the truth which forms the subject of this volume. But if, the instant they have passed the portals of the celestial city, the redeemed from among men will be made partakers of a bliss, as the fruits of their Heavenly Father's affection, far transcending their loftiest conceptions on earth,—we leave it to the minds of those believers, into whose hands this volume may come, to form the best ideas they can of the extent of the blessedness which, when countless ages have rolled away, and been absorbed in a by-gone eternity, will be seen and felt to be comprehended in the words,—“**GOD IS LOVE.**”

Probably there is no subject within the whole compass of revealed truth which is more fitted for *practical improvement* to the believer, than that on which we have been dilating. What could make a deeper impression on the minds and hearts of those who have realized a sense of it in their own souls, than the eternal, spontaneous, infinite love of God to a ruined race? It is a wondrous and soul-transporting theme, and, as before remarked, it will continue to be unceasingly so through all eternity. But its

effects on the minds of believers in Christ must not be confined to mere admiration, or even adoration. It ought to exercise a practical influence on the life; and it will do so wherever it is duly discerned by the mind and felt in the heart. We are bound by obligations of the most solemn kind to love God in return for His free, unpurchased, boundless love to us, made all the more marvellous when we reflect on the circumstances—the sufferings and death of His own dear Son—under which it has been manifested towards us. And all God's saints *do* love Him, because He first loved them. *Their* love to God, in return for His love towards them, is not, in the case of all His people, the same in degree; but still, it does exist and glow in the bosom of every believer. And every believer longs for and strives to possess an increasing fervour of affection for that God who has loved him from all eternity with a love too deep ever to be fathomed by men or angels, and which is as unchangeable as is the nature of Him who is without variableness or shadow of turning,—a love, moreover, which will be as enduring as the existence of God himself.

And believers are no less bound to give a practical expression of their love to God, than they are to feel and cherish that love in their bosoms. "If ye love me," says Jesus, "keep my commandments." And what Jesus said to His disciples in the days of His earthly sojourn, God says to us from off His throne in glory. The angels practically express their love to God by seeking on all occasions, and under all circumstances, to do His revealed will; and in that fact an implied rebuke is administered to us, for they have not the same cause to love God, and to manifest their love by doing His revealed will, which we the descendants of fallen Adam have; for Christ did not, nor was it the will of his Father he should, dignify the angels by taking their nature on Him; but He took on Him *our* nature, and in that nature suffered and died for us. We are therefore laid under greater obligations than angels to give a practical expression of our love to God, which is to be done by an earnest and uniform desire to render obedience to the Divine commandments in every possible manner, at all times, and under all circumstances. And with what a supreme

pleasure ought all God's people thus habitually to aim at expressing their love to Him who has so loved them from all eternity, and will so love them through all the eternity that is to come.

Nor is it less the duty of all the saints of God to seek to bring others to love Him with all their heart, with all their souls, with all their strength, by directing their minds to the contemplation of His infinite and eternal love to a lost world. This at once glorifies God, and is the sure way to benefit and to bless, for time and eternity, our fellow men. And as it is the duty of believers thus to act towards those around them, so they ought to regard it as the highest privilege which they can enjoy on this side their "HEAVENLY HOME." It is a privilege, too, we ought to remember, that will terminate with our existence on earth. There will be no beings in heaven who shall need our counsels to love God supremely, and to manifest their love to Him by doing His holy will. All there will, from the necessity of their moral natures, love God supremely, and serve Him with perfect hearts and willing minds. Let us, therefore, gladly

and gratefully avail ourselves of every opportunity which presents itself to us, while here below, of practically proclaiming to all around how profound is the sense we entertain of the obligations under which we lie to love that God who so loved us as to give up His only begotten and dearly-beloved Son to an ignominious and excruciating death, that we might not only escape the dismal doom which must otherwise have been ours through endless ages to come, but be made the heirs of a happiness in heaven, at once inconceivably great in degree and eternal in duration.

I have thus dwelt at considerable length, and I trust with pleasure and profit to many of my readers, on a theme which is incomparably the most glorious and most wonderful theme in the illimitable universe of God. No one who has read what I have written can fail to perceive the practical improvement which every believer ought to make of the subject. If God has loved us with an infinite and eternal affection, and has given expression to His love by sending His own Son, in our nature, to our world, to obey and suffer and die for us, is not the

inference as plain, as if it were inscribed in legible letters in the firmament above our heads, that we are thereby laid under the deepest and most solemn obligations to love God in return? Surely love so amazing as that which God hath cherished towards His people from all eternity, and to which He has given a practical manifestation in the incarnation, sufferings, and death of His own dear Son, ought to inspire us with an affection towards Him immeasurably too great to be expressed by any language which we can employ. When we contemplate the love of God to us under the various aspects in which I have endeavoured, however imperfectly, to present to the minds of those into whose hands this volume may fall, do we not see more clearly than we ever did before the justice and the force of the demand which God makes on us when He claims our supreme affections in return? If it be in His view the greatest of all the Divine commandments that we should love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our soul, with all our strength, surely no saint of His will withhold his assent to the reasonable-

ness of the claim which God thus makes on us. It is true that so long as we are in our present probationary state, ever exposed to the corruptions inherent in our nature, and to temptations from without, we never can make the unreserved surrender of our affections to Him which He demands, and which is our reasonable service to present to Him. But though while in this world no child of God can love Him as He ought to be loved, yet surely no one will make that an excuse for not seeking to love God better than he has hitherto done. If we cannot while here below love God as we ought, let us at least seek to love Him as we may be made to love Him through the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. And as there are no means so much adapted than close and constant meditation on God's love to us, to increase day by day our love to Him, until His love is made perfect in glory, let each of us resolve that the love of God to us, as revealed in Christ Jesus His Son, shall henceforth be the great theme of our contemplation.

But this must not be all. Our love to God, as the effect of His love to us, must not rest in mere

sentiment; there must be something more than that. The feeling must be expressed in a practical form. We must serve God as the fruit of our loving Him. What was said by Christ when He dwelt among men—"If ye love me, keep my commandments"—is equally addressed by God the Father to all His people. Indeed, if we do not cordially and constantly consecrate ourselves to the service of God, the fact will conclusively prove that we have no real or right love to God at all.

And should we, by the teaching and grace of the Holy Spirit, be brought to this holy and happy state of mind, we shall all feel that the solemn obligations imposed upon us by the eternal and boundless love of God to us will not end there. All of us shall feel that it is our bounden, as it ought to be felt by us to be our blessed, duty to seek to promote the glory of God in the world by endeavouring to lead all with whom we come into contact, in the respective spheres in which we have been placed by Providence, to love and serve Him with all their hearts while they have a being on earth, as the prelude to a perfect love and a

nobler service in that brighter and better world to come, to which every believer in Jesus is on his way, and will, when a few more years at the farthest have succeeded those which have gone before them, most surely reach.

THE END.

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

I.

Lately published, price 5s. in cloth, or 5s. 6d. beautifully done up in gilt edges, the EIGHTH EDITION of

GOD IS LOVE ;

OR,

GLIMPSES OF THE FATHER'S INFINITE AFFECTION
FOR HIS PEOPLE.

THE following extract, which will be read with much interest, is from a letter written by an excellent Christian lady and able authoress, addressed to the Editor of *The Gospel Magazine*, in which she relates a deeply-touching incident caused by the perusal of "GOD IS LOVE :"—

"Your review of the book 'GOD IS LOVE ; OR, GLIMPSES OF THE FATHER'S INFINITE AFFECTION FOR HIS PEOPLE,' brings a circumstance to my mind that may prove useful to relate, as a word of encouragement to the author in his work and labour of love, and to *your Christian readers in furthering its circulation*. I was cast into company last month with an aged lady, who, taking up a book that lay on her table, said, 'This is the *third* copy I have bought of this book, and I mean to *recommend it to everybody*. It is called "GOD IS LOVE."' On being asked why she liked it, she said, 'Because it explained to me why I love God. It opened up to me that God elected me because He loved me, and that is the reason I love Him. I never saw this so plainly till I read that book. Now,' continued the old lady, 'that may seem a great thing to get out of the book ; but I have got something better still.' To know what was better than that, excited the question directly, 'What more did you get?' 'I was deeply interested in the book,' she said ; 'but for all I am an

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old woman, eighty-four, and have been what the world calls decidedly pious for many years, and I really do hope honestly seeking Jesus, yet I could never look up to God, and say, My Father! I often wondered would God let me die in this state; and many, many prayers have I put up to God about this very thing. But one day, while I was reading this book, I came to the words, "My Heavenly Father;" and as I read them a light seemed to dart into my mind, and with it such a lovely, such a beautiful feeling; it seemed to say, *I am your Father—your Heavenly Father.* I put down the book. I fell upon my knees; I felt as if I could weep my life away for joy and gladness, and all I could say over and over again was, My Heavenly Father—my own dear Father."

"A treasure of comfort and edification. The author brings together a marvellous store of Scriptural passages, setting forth the love of God. The fourth chapter retains all the richness of the one which precedes it, increasing in tenderness, and filling the soul unutterably full of the thought that God is Love. Then follow two admirable chapters, succeeded by one of uncommon interest on the love of God as manifested in the mission of Christ unto our world; while the love of the Father is set forth by endless proofs. The book is one which you will take up again and again whenever you feel your heart needing something to melt and comfort it; and when you are disposed to say, 'Nearer, my God, to thee.'"—*Watchman.*

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[Nearly the whole of the religious journals reviewed this volume in substantially the same terms.]

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Mrs. E. Carus Wilson having written to the publishers of these works; expressing an earnest desire to know the name of the author, because, to use her own language, her late husband, the excellent Rev. E. Carus Wilson, M.A., formerly Vicar of Crosby Ravensworth, Westmoreland, who died at Clifton, near Bristol, a short time since, "*enjoyed and feasted on them till the end,*"—the author was but too happy to gratify the wishes of the widow of so eminent and able a servant of Christ. On the receipt of the author's note, without the loss of a single post, Mrs. Wilson wrote a letter to him, which has afforded him a measure of delight which language cannot express. Amongst

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other things, the bereaved widow of one of the holiest of men says: "I can truly say my blessed departed one *devoured all* your books. They were such a solace and refreshment to him! He read them *again and again*, and he was eagerly expecting your last work—'GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT'—which he had just ordered, when his summons came. It arrived *the day after* his departure. He had read over and enjoyed 'OUR HEAVENLY HOME' several times during this year, and up to the last. One day ere his last illness, when I asked him what he was reading so intently, he answered, 'Need you ask? I am in my HEAVENLY HOME.' Soon after, he said, 'I take up one of these chapters, I *dwell upon it, I feast upon it.*' How often my dear one wished to know the author's name. If *ever* a soul was *ripe for glory, his was.*"

"'OUR HEAVENLY HOME' is most assuredly unsurpassed by any of the non-inspired writings of the present day. Not a sentence bearing upon the great hereafter has escaped his searching scrutiny; and the homely, gentle manner in which he enunciates spotless truths, and endeavours to win earth's wanderers to the fold of Christ, must tell upon the hearts, whilst engrossing the love, of his readers."—*Liverpool Herald*.

"Worthy of the admirable works which preceded it. We spoke of the author's last work, 'THE COMFORTER,' as worthy to take its place beside Doddridge's 'Rise and Progress;' the present is no less entitled to rank on a footing with 'The Saints' Everlasting Rest' of the immortal Baxter."—*Banffshire Journal*.

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"It is refreshing to meet with a volume of the substantial nature of the one before us, in which the great doctrines of Scripture, as these bear on man individually and personally, are discussed with clearness and force. Like all its predecessors, 'GRACE AND GLORY' manifests a thorough and complete mastery of the subjects discussed. To his delightful task is brought a mind richly stored with Divine truth, and a spirit largely imbued with the 'hallowed and hallowing employ.' 'GRACE AND GLORY' is a meet companion volume to the able author's work entitled, 'THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL,' which we noticed at the time of its appearance. Both works have a direct bearing on the inner life

—that life which manifests itself in all the fruits of the Spirit and close walk with God. The spirit which pervades the whole book from page to page is that of faithfulness and affection—of one himself deeply imbued with the truth, and in earnest that his fellow-Christians may also fully realize and enjoy their ‘high calling of God in Christ Jesus.’ More profitable reflections on the several topics of the volume we have not read; and while they are both salutary and searching, they are in the highest degree consolatory, exhibiting as they do the amplitude and fullness of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, ‘who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich.’”—*Edinburgh Witness*.

“This volume is published anonymously; but we believe we are correct in attributing the authorship to the editor of a first-class daily newspaper. That he should find time to issue volume after volume—the present is the seventh within a few years—of Theological Treatises, is, it must be acknowledged, very rare indeed. The present work consists of twelve chapters, which treat of Man’s Ruined Condition by Nature—Salvation by Grace alone—The Means of Grace in Conversion—Divine Grace in the Final Perseverance of the Saints—Restraining Grace—Restoring Grace—Growth in Grace—Divine Grace in the Believer’s Death—and The Consummation of Grace in Glory. We have pleasure in calling the attention of his own countrymen in Scotland to the present work, and to the series, which has the savour of the old theology—so presented that ‘he who runs may read.’”
—*Aberdeen Journal*.

VIII.

Lately published, THIRD EDITION, price 5s., cloth,

TRUTHS FOR THE DAY OF LIFE AND THE HOUR OF DEATH.

The following letter relative to this Work, from the REV. AUBREY CHARLES PRICE, Minister of the Lock Chapel, has just appeared in the *Record*:—

“Some little time ago you reviewed very favourably an excellent book entitled, ‘TRUTHS FOR THE DAY OF LIFE AND THE HOUR OF DEATH,’ written by the author of ‘GOD IS

DARTON & CO., 42, PATERNOSTER ROW.

LOVE,' 'OUR HEAVENLY HOME,' &c., and published by Virtue Brothers, Paternoster Row. Considerably more than one half of the volume is devoted to the subject of the *Assurance of Faith and How to Obtain it*. It may interest you, and will encourage the author, to know that three cases have recently come under my notice in which the book has been made, by the Holy Spirit, the means of bringing peace and joy to the troubled conscience.

"One case is that of an old Indian officer, who for the last five years had been deeply convinced of sin, but unable to realize his interest in the atoning work of Christ. A friend gave him this book. He read and re-read it, and he is now rejoicing in an assured hope of heaven.

"The second case is that of a lady, who, to use her own words, 'had been for some months in despair,' but who is now able to rest in quiet confidence on the finished work of the Saviour.

"The third case is equally interesting. It is that of a young man, a solicitor, who, during the last two years, has been a regular member of my congregation. Eighteen months ago he came to me in great trouble about his soul. I shall never forget my first interview with him. I have never witnessed such deep agony of spirit. Again and again I have conversed with him, and have sought by every argument I could use to remove his doubts, but all in vain. Six weeks ago I asked him to read 'TRUTHS FOR THE DAY OF LIFE AND THE HOUR OF DEATH.' He did so, and the next time I saw him, said, 'I am happier. I think I see what my fault has been. I have been trying to base my peace on the Spirit's work in me instead of on the Saviour's work for me.' A few days afterwards he called again. His face was radiant with joy. There was no excitement, but there was calm, solid peace, and he said, tears of joy filling his eyes as he spoke, 'I shall never cease to thank God that He placed this book in my way, and to pray for blessings on its author.'

"Surely, sir, it is matter for no little thankfulness that, in these days of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy, God has enabled one of his servants, amidst avocations of the most urgent and onerous nature, to write and publish book after book, full to overflowing with sound Gospel truth. The Church of Christ owes him a deep debt of gratitude, and ought to uphold him with many and fervent prayers."

"What a prolific pen the author wields! Volume after volume has Mr. Grant given us of late, all on subjects of the highest interest, and all models of elegant writing. Yet, not only is there no

falling off in the interest which these volumes are fitted to create, but though we know that they are produced amidst a multiplicity of other labours, they are comprehensive in their thinking, and finished in their execution, as if the subject had been the sole study of the author's lifetime, and not a thought or care had intruded to distract his mind or consume his time when engaged in writing them. This is truly marvellous. Each successive volume is as fresh in matter and eloquent in composition as its predecessor."—*Witness*.

 IX.

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STEPS AND STAGES ON THE ROAD TO GLORY.

"The *Christian Observer*, on another occasion, remarked that the books of the author (Mr. James Grant) were not to be criticised, but enjoyed, and that in point of soundness they might range with those of Scott and Newton, of Doddridge and Bunyan, of Bates and Howe. We believe that the present volume will take its place with its predecessors; for it exhibits the same characteristics. Gifted with a clear and vigorous intellect, the author has been taught of God that lesson which the natural man cannot receive, and speaks out of the abundance of a heart renewed by the Holy Spirit, and anxious for the salvation of all around him."—*Record*.

 X.

Also, recently published, price 2s. 6d., cloth,

THE DYING COMMAND OF CHRIST.

"This is incomparably the most complete, compact, and satisfactory work on the subject to which it relates to be met with in the English language. Never before was 'THE DYING COMMAND OF CHRIST' so presented in all its bearings. The book is one which will live, and, on behalf of its author, constitute a high and an indefeasible claim on the gratitude of generations yet to be born."—*British Standard*.

XI.

Likewise this day is published, price 5s., beautifully bound in cloth, the SECOND EDITION.

THE END OF ALL THINGS ;

OR,

THE COMING AND KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

“The work will lead men to think—to examine for themselves—and, we doubt not, settle and establish many a wavering mind. It is sure to cause a tremendous commotion among Millenarians.”—*Gospel Magazine*.

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